The Mopinomicon

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Published by Bodie Satva, 2024.

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THE MOPINOMICON

First edition. January 12, 2024.

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ISBN: 979-8224986736

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Chapter 1: Oh God, What the Fuck

Something fucking crazy happened to me. I'm enlightened.

Imagine you haven't seen me in a while. It's a totally normal Tuesday. You park your shitty car, and we sit down in those comfy-ass chairs by the fire in a quaint little English pub. Through the window, there's a Blade Runner-esque vista—drenched in neon, pouring with acid rain. You ask, 'Hey, what's up? How you been? Still mopping stairs?' and take a swig of your pint of lager. I sip my chocolate milk and vodka while I eye a clown juggling several smaller clowns as he strolls past the window.

'There was a brief time when I could drive with my eyes closed because I had bat-like echolocation. I'm ninety percent sure there was a ghost living in my wall, and for nine months, it felt like I was on a natural acid trip. The lines between reality and dreams blurred, and now I know when someone talks shit about me on the astral plane. These were some of the more pleasant side effects of what I assume was the beginning of an ever-present multifaceted journey commonly referred to as enlightenment. But yes, I'm still mopping floors.'

I shit my pants.

The room, sensing my need for an escape, morphs into the idea of a dog and trots off to meet Death at the bar across the street. The Blade Runner vista decides it never really liked steampunk and becomes a school of fish. One of the chairs claims to be an ascended master, but with all those teeth, I can tell you right now—he is absolutely not.

You, like me, dear reader, are thoroughly fucking confused and covered in shit.

In case it wasn't clear: I think I was enlightened. Like, properly, cosmically enlightened. Buddha-style. One random day at work, out of nowhere, I leaned on the hidden veil and accidentally fell through. I had thought it was a wall. Things were normal until they weren't. One minute I'm mopping up god knows what in a stairwell, the next I'm a fucking bug on some alien planet, crawling

across a desert. And by the way, I'm also everything else at the same time. You ever been a blade of grass?

Fuck me.

I used to live in that baseline reality—presumably, you're there now, reading this in book form—but what I've gone through? It was real. It happened. And now I'm different. Maybe you will be too. Or not. That's also completely fine, interestingly enough.

But here's the thing—I think this is happening to other people. I think we're reaching some sort of global consciousness crescendo, and you might be part of it. Why? Fuck you, that's why. It's a non-linear, higher-dimensional fuck you. I'm not claiming to be God, even if I am, or any other guru, god, or crazy-ass thing. Those things absolutely exist, and I might actually turn out to be one of them. Who knows? But don't worry—I'd still be your friend. Samwise-tier loyalty. I think I can share some knowledge in a relatable way, even though it seems fucking crazy. Before enlightenment, all of this shit was just in my brain. I had known it, and eventually, I understood it. Maybe that's all you will need too? I think it'll make sense by the end of the book. At least, I hope you'll have a few laughs.

I just want to write a cool book about this crazy shit I experienced. Maybe you want to read it. I'm just a guy telling you about his week. You won't even notice that I have no idea how to write a fucking book. Way, way too many swears.

For some backstory: I've always been into weird shit, but I wasn't particularly weird myself. Bit of a normie, to be honest. Or normie-passing, at least at first. In 2014 I met an American girl, we traveled, and got married. Left everything behind. It was fucking great. I lived in Ecuador for three years. But I was blessed with the triple crown: severe depression, anxiety, and a long spell of unemployment. So, naturally, I spent about ten years absorbing information like a sponge in a bottomless pit of human misery.

What triggered the depression? I don't know. Shit just happens sometimes. To find some relief, I tried everything. I discovered I had a knack for meditation and philosophy, but in a fun, not-too-serious way. I was interested in questions like, What the fuck does 'all is one' mean? And can a chimp kill a horse? I'd read about meditation, enlightenment, and found it cool—but I was more of a window shopper than a true seeker. Before enlightenment, I never religiously meditated. I did have a lot of hours under my belt, but that's like 5 minutes every time I felt like it over ten years. You know how it is. I'm just sort of always meditating now.

By 2020, I was on the other side of the planet. America. Uh oh! Stinky! Depressed as fuck. My marriage was failing, and I had exactly one friend. I was doing that thing people do when they somehow lie to themselves that everything is fine. Smoking too much, drinking too much. And literally holed up in a shed in the back garden most of the time. It was nice and womb-like in there, maybe?

By 2021, my wife left me for that friend, and I was constantly drunk or high—preferably both. I don't blame either of them, but it was visceral, physical agony that persisted for months. This woman had been everything to me. I had given her everything I had. Left everything behind. It was a weight of problems I wasn't equipped to deal with. I'm sure you can relate; these things have a way of sort of snowballing almost without you realizing it.

I felt like I was dying every day. That period of my life was fucking dark. I was ashamed to be me. Barely left the house. Became almost completely nocturnal for some reason. I hope you never feel like that—I really, really do. I didn't even know those emotions existed. I hung a sign on my fridge: "Days Since Absolute Rock Bottom." It showed 0 for months.

But here's the paradox—some of those days, passed out in my Speedos on the front lawn, were also the best fucking days of my life. The tallest trees grow from seeds buried in unbearably heavy earth.

Fun fact from those years: The bar I frequented had a single bagpipe tune on the jukebox. I was the first customer to ever necessitate a kill switch be installed behind the bar.

Around this time, I started having dreams. Freaky dreams. In them, there was this weird little woman with long dark hair. We'd go on adventures together. I didn't know who the fuck she was, but I loved her deeply in the dreams. She gave me something to look forward to. The dreams came and went. We'd blow things up with lightning and hang out with two little girls from time to time. Shit like that. I didn't think too much about it.

Eventually, I got a job at a shitty supermarket, the first one that would hire me. And guess what? The creepy little weirdo from my dreams comes barreling out of the fruit section wielding a knife. She was my coworker. I told her I'd already met her in my dreams, and she just casually told me she'd watched a soul leave a body once. Fate? Damn right. We've been married ever since. Hers is the only love that comes close to what I felt during my experience. A constant best friend and partner. Probably 90% responsible for my enlightenment. Thanks, wife! Maybe she'll pop up in the book?

Those two girls from the dreams? My nieces, but they weren't even born in 2021. Idiots.

By 2022, we moved back to my hometown across the planet. I started mopping floors. Staircases mostly. Life was good. I felt I had shed most of the things keeping me down. Moving forward. Looking back, I can't pinpoint any specific practices, but I was feeling way better. Singing and dancing at work. It's a classic stereotype, but I embraced it. I'm that guy, and I won't apologize. Maybe it was the love, or maybe it was just time.

Then one day, in 2024, around 11 a.m., while I was mopping, something snapped—or maybe opened—and boom. Reality cracked wide open like a fucking wizard's sleeve at bingo night.

One moment I'm mopping floors, the next I'm everywhere and everything at once. I understood everything. Not an exaggeration. Everything. And no, I don't know everything now, obviously. Otherwise, I'd be some cosmic orgasm,

not typing this up in a Ford Transit van. I know that's convenient, but it's like trying to get a billion Blu-rays onto a Gameboy cartridge. You know what I mean? But some understanding definitely crammed in there. Like a jelly bean.

Being everything was like an extremely vivid daydream, but uncontrollable. Once it started, I just stood there. Every daydream, smell, texture, feeling, life—all at once. So, yeah, that includes all the wild stuff that defies normal human conventions. My human mind was trying to process what was going on. "Am I having a stroke?" crossed my mind.

I should've been panicking—heart racing, mind on fire—but instead, I was wrapped in indescribable warmth. Love. My whole body buzzed, tingling from the tips of my fingers to the soles of my feet, like I'd just plugged into the universe itself. This feeling of love stuck with me for a long time, like an afterglow.

At first, I wasn't sure if I had imagined the whole experience. But it was so intense, so real, that I couldn't ignore it. I had felt energy before, sure, but this was another level entirely. I couldn't talk about it without crying for months. And that's the problem with spiritual experiences—how the fuck do you explain something like that to people? You can't. They call it a kundalini awakening or enlightenment, or whatever. But to me, it was just that: enlightenment. And it unglued me from everything.

The weirdest part? I forgot almost an entire month after the enlightenment. A total blank. I was blissed out, just flowing with everything. I'd drive to work, knowing conversations before they even happened, like I was following a script. (By the way, past me left me a bunch of notes—literal notes—in shoes and pockets, and I keep finding them. It's pissing me off.) My sense of self? Gone.

The man I had been was just a jacket I took off. I was everything and nothing. I was the mop.

Then, bam—reality sucked me back down. Depression. Chaos. Racing thoughts. Mild psychosis. One day I just switched back to Earth.

Suddenly, I wasn't sure what was real and what was imagination anymore. Was I God? Was I crazy? I knew this kind of thing happened to people, but to me? I mean, how would you feel if this happened to you? Most people would keep quiet, right? It was alienating as hell. How could someone like me—a cleaner, for fuck's sake—be enlightened? I had to be mad.

Months passed, and the memory of my enlightenment started to fade. And yes, that's a thing that can happen. Can you believe that? You can forget that you are the universe. What a fucking rip. But that's what happened—I just... forgot. Then one day, a random podcast triggered it all again. Boom. Blissed out as the memories came rushing back. Turns out, my system had been blown out—like a computer that short-circuited—and I had to reboot. This time, though, I could manage it. I could feel the energy again, but now it was more like looking at the world through sunglasses. Which, let's be real, are always cool as fuck.

In that manic state, I frantically typed up everything I could remember from my enlightenment. And guess what? That's what you'll find in Chapter 2. I'm not one for dragging things out, so I'm giving you the money shot up front. No time to fuck about, right? I believe in showing you the good stuff right away—because who's got time for a slow build when the universe is literally peeling open in front of you?

As far as I can tell, I might be a bodhisattva. That's basically an insane maniac who incarnates over and over to help people. At some point during the enlightenment—or maybe in another life, who the hell knows—I must've promised to enlighten everyone, or at least try to. Big oops on that one.

But here we are, you got the mr bean bodhisattva, so I might as well do my best. And look, that's why this text is as wacky as it is. That's why this book is wacky. It's like a modern wisdom text written by some asshole. If this doesn't resonate with you, that's fine—there are plenty of other spiritual books out there that are less, well, chaotic. And pretty much all of them are worth reading. But I promise you this: I'll share what I've learned, and you might even have a laugh or six along the way. Editors note : laughs may vary.

After these wild events, I mellowed out again. Things aren't quite so intense now. I still feel that same higher connection, that energy, but it's not all-consuming. I just... am. Same old me, just more vivid. The edges of reality feel a little sharper, the colors a little brighter. Everything is more meaningful. I see the world a bit differently now, but I'm still mopping floors, still living life like everyone else.

So what the fuck happened to me? Did I lose my mind, or did I stumble onto something bigger than all of us? Maybe both. Either way, I'm taking you along for the ride bitch, and by the end, you'll either get it—or at least have a good laugh trying.

Strange places, strange people, and perhaps some strange new ideas. Some of it's bullshit, but most of it's true. Just enjoy the ride. Learn some shit. And hey, if I am losing my mind, at least I've got a full head of hair. The hair is also enlightened.

Welcome to the clusterfuck. Let's dive in headfirst.

I'm doing a flip!

Chapter 2: The Journey Begins

Alright, you little punk. Let's take a breather. You want another drink? We actually are in a bar, by the way—the shit at the beginning of the book? Pure artistic flavor. It didn't turn into a dog—that would be ridiculous. This place? It's real. I know it's a book and it might just be imagination to you, but I'm actually here. I dunno—it's like a dream, or a mental plane or the astral realm or some bullshit. I spent a lot of time in bars as a human, and apparently, that just carries over. Go figure. Now, go wander around, I need to go take a shit.

I stumble off, knocking over several empty chocolate milks and vodkas, my chair, and the chair of a centaur standing by the booth behind us. He's not even using it. You hear me mumble something as I disappear into the throng.

It's old in here. Impossibly old. You might think it was remade from the Ship of Theseus and designed by Escher during his really experimental days. If you had any taste in art, you fucking pleb. Imagine a classic old English pub—that'll do 90% of the work. The other 60%? Pure Dolly Parton memorabilia and hyper-shapes you can't comprehend. I mean, c'mon, you know what an astral pub looks like. You're already imagining it, painting the walls red or some dumb shit. So just be here. But mind your manners dude.

The guy (absolute dick) who owns the place claims each piece of wood is from a different bar he's owned and that he's gotten to at least first base with every possible incarnation of Dolly Parton. He's obviously full of shit because the bar top itself is infinitely long. Like Dolly Parton when she sees that guy, it just disappears off into the distance. The entire book was constructed around this joke.

I'm not the only one who thinks he just converted one of those infinite shopping mall realms into a bar—lazy bastard. We sent someone to see where the bar ends and the mall begins, but we're still waiting on that guy. You get it, right? If you've ever dreamed of shopping mall realms, I recommend the ball

pits by the chicken wing stand. Don't go to shower/toilet realm. That's MY turf. I will fuck you up if I see you there. Again, these are all real places.

The barman? Currently five light years away trying to get Orson Welles to pay his tab. Unsurprisingly, most patrons just help themselves, tossing whatever gold, paper, or slime counts as currency in their home land across the bar. It's relatively clean. The place is packed with every possible seating combo, and perched on those chairs, tree stumps, and upturned Ark of the Covenants are the patrons: gods, ghosts, grandads, and geologists.

Shiva's playing two games of pool at once—against Attila the Hun and some guy projecting from his couch in Bulgaria. There's a horse. It's just a regular horse. You, holding a mop. A mass of tentacles plays level 19 Dance Dance Revolution against a grey alien who, somehow, keeps pace. A couple of Buddha guys are absolutely shit-faced and brawling with a group of Jonestown victims while Maitreya tries to mediate. Classic. Meanwhile, against the back wall, something from the meat dimension is warping the room, turning several patrons into glistening, sentient meat. Meat. It smells. David Bowie isn't visible, but there's glitter on the floor, and you can sense his presence nearby. He's obviously going to be here.

All in all, a relatively normal Tuesday morning.

The place is fucking hopping. Throat-singing versions of Phil Collins anthems blast through unseen speakers. Everyone's talking about work, the latest shoes, games, debates—bucket bong rips of prayers. There's even a chariot angel hot-boxing in the corner. And the booze is flowing. Not earthly booze—this is the good shit, non-poisonous stuff. Good vibes visibly thrum through the air over your head and through you. Feels like post-coital bliss with absolutely no sexual connotations whatsoever. Freaky. This is where the universal oddballs come to chill.

The smoke from various non-OSHA-approved candles and pipes wafts from almost every available surface—mouths, pockets, gargoyles, and wizardly fingers of every description. The selection behind the bar? Full of every drink

you've ever heard of—and even more you haven't. Some of these drinks aren't even liquids. That's how ahead of the game they are.

Reaching behind the bar, you fumble for a bottle of water and almost grab a Conca-Crola, but your great-great-great-grandad grabs your arm. You don't know it's him, but he winks at you knowingly and reaches behind the bar. He tosses you a Bob Ross Happy Little Lager. You look down to admire the tree-shaped bottle with a smile. When you look back up to thank him, he's gone.

Oh wait—no, he's over there talking to someone. Plus, it's loud in here, and your feet hurt. You start to awkwardly wander back to our table, narrowly avoiding a bolt of lightning from Zeus' hand that ricochets through a nearby Greek dude into the bar. Plato reverently places a beer mat over the corpse.

It's taken you three hours to walk five feet, and you're missing half an eyebrow.

"Good choice," I say, sliding back into my role as The Narrator. Now that we've had a nice relaxing break, we can really get into it. I'm visibly sweaty, and a square of toilet paper is stuck to one of my sandals. I look over at you and flash a smile. I fucking love hanging out with you. You're a weird dude. I saw you checking out that orc. You're handling things really well.

"Being in this bar," I continue, "dropped into this madness right at the start of the book, it's a bit like how my enlightenment hit me. No warning, no explanation—just thrown into the deep end and told to swim. Except, back then, I didn't have the luxury of post-coital Phil Collins throat-singing or David Bowie lurking in the shadows. I was just standing there, holding a mop."

I pause, as if weighing whether to continue, then lean back on a single leg in my chair.

"Yeah, I know this place looks like chaos, but it makes sense to me now somehow. Hell, everything made sense after my... episode, I guess you'd call it. I mean, at first, I got the whole 'Buddha-mode' experience. Then, I lost it. What was left? A jumbled mess of chill wisdom and pop culture fused together, like some ephemeral fever dream. Merlin with more psychosis. So, I adapted."

I wave my chocolate milk and vodka around the bar, gesturing at the gods, ghosts, and geologists all coexisting in this ridiculous pub.

"This place? It's basically a reflection of how I see things now. Enlightenment wasn't *all* peace and love. That was a major part of It. But this was more like someone cracked open the universe and dumped its contents all over me while I was mopping floors. And here's the thing : I'm still figuring it out."

I chuckle and finish the last of my drink before setting the glass down with a solid boing noise. "Look, I'm not claiming to be some enlightened guru or whatever. I'm just an enlightened guy who's seen some shit. Maybe slightly further along the same path. But I did try to make some sense of it. I wrote something—this rambling mess of a text that explains, or at least tries to explain, what the fuck happened to me. What I learned."

I glance at you, a mix of hesitation and excitement playing across my face. "It's called The Mopinomicon." I lower my voice in mock seriousness. "Yes, that's what I named it. And no, I wasn't entirely sober when I did."

As I say the name, a few glasses clatter and a barstool vaporizes under Rasputin. I shrug. "Don't mind that. Happens every time."

You look at me expectantly, and I lean forward, tapping the table for emphasis. "Anyway, this text? It's not some polished, profound manifesto. Homie don't play that shit. It's more like... imagine the wisdom of the ages got smashed together with a truckstop bathroom in a Star Trek transporter accident, and somehow Neelix is involved. Fuck that guy. Yeah, it's a mess, but it's my mess."

I stop talking for a moment, as if I'm reluctant to show you the raw chaos that is the text. Then I sigh, realizing there's no point in holding back now. You've already seen one of my testicles.

"But here's what matters—the part I remember, the important part. This is what I wrote when everything came rushing back to me. The closest I've come to explaining the feeling of enlightenment. The moment it hit."

I pause for a second, letting it sink in. "Alright, here it is—the important part of The Mopinomicon. The bit I can remember."

It was an indescribable experience.

Here is a description of the experience.

To make a long story short, I was mopping the floor at my work when I was suddenly enlightened. I'm here to usher in a golden age. Naturally, I thought it would be fun to let you know first. I've already started my work and it can't be stopped. Not even I know what the fuck I'm doing. It started the instant I woke up. All you can do is watch. Or you could join me. This isn't like one of those crystal shaggers going on about peace and love. I'm the real McCoy and I'm going to give it to you straight because I love you. I'm not claiming to be anyone. I just am.

I don't care if you believe me I just wanted you to know that I'm in your corner. I've always been in your corner and I will always be in your corner. Forever. I'm sorry it took me 30 odd years to wake up. I am hungry for this fight. You know the planets fucked, they know the planets fucked, I know the planets fucked. And let me tell you I am not happy about it. Some cunt has been fucking with the natural order and no cunt leaves till we find out which cunt did it.

I'm a cleaner. I think I'm always a cleaner. I just love mopping. I mop floors all day every day and while I mop, I listen to the goonies soundtrack and I think. I was thinking about how funny it was that everything I had ever done or felt or experienced had led me exactly where I needed to be to make me, ME. The good and the bad. I had been walking along a path that I couldn't see to a destination that I didn't know. That's why I was me and not some other guy. In the same way, I had touched the lives of others to make them who they were, and been a stone in their own path. In turn those arseholes went on to touch the lives of others still. We couldn't, and wouldn't, exist without each other. In a way we were each other.

On and on it went. It made sense to me that if this was the case then It would be advantageous for me to spread as much joy as possible. I thought this was probably true for everything that existed or ever would exist on Earth. Sort of like all the shit those baldies keep going on about. I thought about it like It was

a massive ball of infinitely dense and complex strings all tangled around each other. You couldn't touch a single part of this ball without somehow touching everything else, they were tangled up so bad. You couldn't do a cause without making an effect SOMEWHERE. The strings are people's lives and shit and the ball they make would be reality. In case you aren't following.

So while it made sense to me that my life was like a piece of string in this ball we call reality, it was also like a rubiks cube.

Everything I had ever done or felt or experienced was like a little piece of an extremely complex personal rubiks cube twisting and turning throughout my entire life. Everyone had one of these rubiks cubes just churning away as their story gets written. It was an interesting thought, I thought. What if I solved mine? I'm a pretty spiritual guy. I've seen some shit. Maybe that's what enlightenment was, I thought.

What if all I had to do was one more mop push. What if that was the last piece of MY puzzle. Just a single random mop push in an infinitely complex series of events. A series of events that had the entire universe behind it. One more turn of my rubix cube, and the puzzle would be solved? I would be enlightened? They do say it just sort of happens. Wouldn't that be fucking hilarious? I thought so. Apparently the Universe also thought this was hilarious.

I pushed my mop and nothing happened. Obviously. Why would it? Oh well, I thought. But the universe is a sassy bitch, you can believe me on that. Back to the grind baby. I pushed my mop one more time and the rubiks cube clicked into place inside me. It was complete. I was whole. I had reached my destination - spoiler alert for spiritual seekers, there was no destination. The rubiks cube shattered and I remembered what I was. I was AWAKE.

Everything that I THOUGHT was ME went rushing out and the universe came rushing in. If you imagine yourself as a cup, then everything you perceive as YOU would be the liquid inside that cup. But really you were the cup the entire time. Whatever goes into the cup becomes the cup. That's why you don't fill your cup with shit. You respawn with the same cup. Like, the cup you is still

YOU it was just buried under a fucking pile of bricks made of human madness and suffering.

The universe had just picked up my cup and thrown the contents to the wind. For future reference I might call my consciousness 'a cup'. Just so you know.

My body was still. I was just standing there holding my mop, a not uncommon gormless look on my face. But my consciousness was standing on the edge of the Earth as the universe came streaming into me, through me, past me. My soul was laid bare for the universe and it just kept coming. I was that guy from Titanic standing on the bow of the ship but it wasn't a false flag I was barreling towards, it was everything, everywhere, everywhen. To plagiarize someone who must have met the universe:

I was staring into the face of god and I was completely annihilated in its presence.

My cup began to grow. I began to know. I was everything on Earth. I was everything that had ever been on Earth. I was everything that would ever be on earth. I was every single man, woman, child, animal, insect, plant and rock to have ever existed. I was fucking everything. All of it. I was everything they had ever thought or would think. I was everything they experienced and ever would experience. I was all their hopes and dreams and hates and fears. I was everything. All the way back and all the way forward. All the way up and all the way down. All the directions you can't normally perceive. All of it. Always. I WAS Earth.

My cup got a little bigger. I knew more. I had been close with my ball analogy. It wasn't a bunch of little strings though. It was all the same string. They were all me and I was all of them! That was the whole point! How could it ever have been any other way? What a wonderful game! It was all just a giant fucking ball of me all tangled together so tightly it became one object. You couldn't touch one part of it without touching all of it. LITERALLY. You couldn't take a shit in 2024 without it derailing a train in India in 1842. I knew this with every fiber of my being to be true. Everything was one. The ocean became a drop and the drop became an ocean. It was all just a matter of perspective.

It was a perfect dance, the best game you ever played, the best play you ever saw, the best dream you ever dreamed, a perfectly constructed machine, the funniest joke you ever heard, it was an infinitely complex rat king and I UNDERSTOOD it. Because I WAS it. It was absolute perfection. It was beautiful beyond words. My body burst out laughing.

A lotus flower blooming in the mud? Yeah I suppose it was a bit like that. The wind blowing on your face is a bit like standing next to the big bang when it goes off.

But it didn't stop there.

My cup became infinitely large. And I knew. I knew everything. I could FEEL the Earth turning beneath me. The Earth turning around the sun. The sun turning around the galaxy. The galaxy turning around the cluster, the cluster turning around the thing. The thing turning around the other thing. On it went. I don't even have words to describe what the fuck I was perceiving. I still have no idea by the way. To places above and below the ken of mortal men and every which way besides. I was spread to every corner of everywhere. I was the smallest thing in existence and the largest at the same time. I was moving infinitely fast and going nowhere at all. I wasn't just the earth anymore. I had never been the Earth. I had never been me. I had never been you. I was EVERYWHERE. EVERYTHING. EVERYWHEN.

I wasn't a ball at all! I was a single piece of string making a tapestry we called the universe.

It was all me! All of it. And it was you too.

This was what it was all about, I knew. THIS state of being. THIS was the game. THIS was ME. THIS was YOU. THIS WAS THE BEST THING THAT COULD EXIST. PERIOD. THIS WAS WHAT IT WAS TO BE. I HAD TO TELL EVERYONE. THEY HAD TO KNOW. EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW. THEN WE COULD ALL STOP KILLING EACH OTHER AND HAVE A GOOD LAUGH ABOUT IT. IT WAS PERFECT. IT WAS LOVE. IT WAS HATE. IT WAS START. IT WAS END. IT WAS UNDERSTANDING. IT WAS FUN. IT WAS.

I knew that everyone would experience this. I had made a promise to you after all. It was just too fucking good. I couldn't wait to tell you. I knew that this wasn't the sort of thing you kept to yourself. Everyone would experience this. I had promised YOU. YOU specifically. YOU would experience THIS. It didn't matter how long it took. I had promised you. I had swore on everything I was or ever would be that you would experience what I had experienced. Everyone would. I would make sure of it. No one would be left behind. Not while I existed.

I would incarnate as many times as it took. In as many Universes as it took. I would go anywhere to find you. Do anything to reach you. From the blackest voids of non existence to the brightest realms of creation I would search for you. From the depths of hell to the boundaries of heaven I would chase you. You would never be so small that I couldn't see you or so far away from me that I couldn't find you. You would never be so low that I couldn't raise you or so high that I couldn't reach you. There was nowhere that my love didn't shine down on you. And I did love you.

I loved you more than you could possibly know. I've always loved you and I always will. All you ever had to do was feel it. If you don't meet me in this life or if I don't get to you, please believe me when I say I will find you. I cannot describe the depths of the oath I took. It was everything to me and I will find you and I will help you to see. Then we will have a beer in the light of a golden dawn.

I had promised you this. But something was wrong. You couldn't feel me as strongly as you should have. There was a cancer on the Earth. Someone who should have known better was fucking with the natural balance. Some fucker had their hand on the scales. Some fucker had pulled the wool over your eyes. Some fucker had tricked you. Swindled you of a right you didn't even know you had. You couldn't see my light. You couldn't hear me calling out to you. Earth was a fucking shithole that hadn't been cleaned in aeons. Beer cans everywhere. Merchants running the show.

I would find the thing responsible for this atrocity. And it was an atrocity. I would destroy them. There must be balance. There WILL be balance. And

there was my promise to you to consider. There was evil hanging over the world. Someone had shit all over my chessboard.

I would wage a one man war against the 'forces of evil'. If the Earth was sick then I would turn everyone I met into a white blood cell. I would give everyone a mop and we would scour the filth away and let in the light. I would be a light that enriched the lives of everyone it touched.

I would become a beacon that was so bright and so large that everyone would see me. Everyone would be able to follow. The world would become heaven on earth.

I had promised you. I would show you somehow.

Simply by existing our light would scorch the evil from this plane and send it back to wherever the fuck it goes when im not destroying it. Someone was bullying my friends and I was the patron saint of fucking kicking heads in.

We would walk across the land hand in hand and utterly annihilate anything that would do us harm. We could walk together into a beautiful new age for humanity. There is nothing that we couldn't do together.

This life is a dream and I would like you to start waking up now.

Also aliens are real.

The whole bar is staring at us—silent. No one's moving. Someone dropped a voodoo doll, and the clatter echoed through the room. Even Shiva has stopped playing pool.

This wasn't the peaceful wisdom of some monk or a guru. This was chaos. Pure, unfiltered chaos, and they could feel it spreading. They knew what it meant for the Earthly plane. It was like someone had unleashed a psychic fart.

And then... panic. Total fucking panic.

Someone was trying to wake up the other apes!

Everyone in the bar is scrambling, trying to make sense of the rant I just unloaded. Someone flips a table; a tentacle monster spills his drinks. Even the Buddha guys are eyeing the exit, unsure if they should punch me in the face or offer me a drink. The whole place is falling apart. Wasn't Jesus responsible for this shit? This was like *Fight Club*, but it's more than just punching heads now—it's punching holes in the veil.

Jesus, fifteen beers deep at the bar, just shrugs. "Not my problem this time," he says, waving it off. But even he knows this is different.

The worst part?

Someone's actually listening to me.

I mean really listening.

That someone is **you.**

The Narrator ***is*** trying to wake up the other apes.

And you're the first.

Everyone looks at us. The gods, ghosts, geologists, and even the fucking regular horse. You don't have talking dogs in your reality. Hell, your reality doesn't even have this kind of bar. But here we are. And fuck me, you're still hanging on every word.

My physical body is there on Earth, talking mad shit to you while my spirit knocks mailboxes over with a baseball bat. There's a new kid on the etheric block and he's wearing sunglasses and only one shoe.

In a moment of unprecedented human narcissism, I had simply wandered off the stage in the middle of someone else's line, and into the wings to smoke cigarettes with the gods.

Fuck me.

"Grab your beer," I say, suddenly serious. "We're getting the fuck out of here. Now."

The bar erupts into chaos behind us as I motion for you to follow. We duck between two giant ducks and walk briskly towards the exit.

Whatever comes next, it's going to be fucking weird.

Probably dream like.

Chapter 4: Waking Up and Not Knowing What the Fuck is Going On

We're still power walking through the bar maelstrom. Don't touch that guy, your skin will melt.

Have you ever had one of those naps after work or school where you wake up, and it feels like you've been out for nine hours? You don't know your name, what year it is, or even where you are. Then, after a few groggy moments, it all comes back to you—Oh yeah, I remember. That's kind of what going through what we just read feels like. What a random enlightenment feels like.

Obviously, it's strange and a bit distressing when you think about it.

I'm not saying enlightenment isn't beautiful and amazing—it is. I was filled with this indescribable love, love for everything. And I'm more now. But seriously, what the fuck? What the fuck was that?

This was chaotic and wild and fun and scary. I don't usually want to scorch things from the earth—not normally. But clearly, I was going through some intense shit. Love and hate? Life and death? Everything and nothing? All attachments vanished. My sense of self completely dissolved. My wife could have died right in front of me and it would honestly have been fine. That's a human problem. And whatever I was in this state was a little bit more complicated. Just pure awareness.

That probably sounds brutal, but I didn't stop caring. The opposite happened. It wasn't bad, just different. There was no me, but I was still just me. Still got happy, still got sad. But my attachments were gone. Attachment to self, attachment to wife, attachment to everything. I loved more powerfully than ever and held everything with reverence, but at the same time, I knew it was like holding onto a fist of sand. Everything was constantly shifting. This sort of in-and-out feeling persists. If wife died, I'd just see her on the other side. Big fucking deal. You know what I mean?

I felt connected to everything, but at the same time profoundly alone. Friends were supportive when I told them, but it was just too weird for a lot of them to understand. Even reading about others experiences and advice was hit or miss, sometimes it felt right, other times it didn't. A lot like this book. I felt lost but at the same time knew that there was nowhere to be. I was the most important person in the universe, and the most meaningless one at the same time. I just sort of existed, usually happily to be fair. Mopping is fun.

But it all felt good now. It was just the way it was. And that was good. That goodness sort of supersedes all other emotions now. It sits up above them, maybe like a sun. The other emotions and things are just running around down on the ground under its light. Once you know this world is a dream you don't get angry at the people running around in it. You don't get angry at the dream. Or at least way, way, less angry.

I still have all of those powerful emotions swirling around sometimes, but I'm kind of above them now. It feels like watching someone else. I'm still a human being, but it's much easier to just float on the ocean of humanness' surface as it rages beneath me. Like, when people act like arseholes, I just don't react. It's not that I don't care, it's just... the way it is. Cut off in traffic? Oh well. My anger's still there, but it doesn't cling to me. It's like a wave that rolls in and out. I still experience life, just without getting hooked by every little thing. Plus, everyone is basically my brother or sister now. Sure they might be an asshole, but they're my asshole.

Was it me speaking? A higher self? God? Or just suppressed anxieties? Psychotic break? Who fucking knows.

You wipe chocolate milk spittle off your face and try to decide. Does this guy ever breathe? Sounds interesting and a bit Buddhisty. You saw a ghost once, so you dunno what to think. I can read your thoughts, you little shit—you'll think what I tell you. Kidding. Maybe. Note to self: add a chapter on free will.

Am I mental? That nagging question is like a massive brick wall—probably one of the biggest obstacles to seeing things like I do. Fear makes you doubt, stress,

and question everything. My mental health was never very good. Was this just my breaking point? How could it be real? Also, do I have to go to work now?

In the immediate afterglows of the two 'enlightenments' there was no question that this was all real. A bajillion percent. The human brain wasn't even in the picture during those. It didn't even get to consider insanity. But now, as whatever I am, it definitely creeps in. But only temporarily, because basically, I don't care. If I'm enlightened it's super good for humanity so I have to pursue this. If I'm insane I can't do much about it and ergo, fuck it.

Well, other people have taken the plunge over the years. Remember Buddha? That crazy bastard? Odds are good I wasn't actually nuts. I decided to just push on through all of that fear and uncertainty. Fuck it. There's loads of people who can do and teach incredible things. Maybe I'm supposed to be one of them? Or maybe I'm just proof that cosmic awareness can trickle down into the gutter.

I decided I'd take one for the team and believe it was all real—just for fun, of course. The enlightenment, the talking to ghosts, the precognition. I drift in and out of this state even now. Or my awareness does. Sometimes I'm plain old human, no different from anyone else, and the next, I seem to be buzzing with love, creating localized sunshine and communicating with any number of actual entities because I BELIEVE I can. Enlightened mode maybe? Like, I'm not just uncontrollably entering schizophrenic states. I don't think...

For example, during one communication, some entity told me the molecular vibration of oxygen—or something else I didn't give a shit about—and it was correct when I looked it up. I did it for loads of things until the entity told me to beat it. Plus, a lot of the shit I felt and experienced had been experienced by other people. It was sort of like proof.

I was no stranger to stories of literally all these paranormal occurrences, but it's just not the same until you experience them for yourself. It really does change you and broaden you. Like a guy seeing a boat for the first time and realizing it wasn't just his kingdom—there was an infinite realm of possibility beyond that once-impossible-to-comprehend ocean. Who knows *what* the fuck was

possible now? Maybe cyborg Hitler really was planning his revenge in the Arctic. Not on my watch, Hitler.

Hitler whips around from, like, 30 tables over. That guy has fucking incredible hearing—what the hell. You scooch down as we walk. This is already way too many Hitlers for your usual literary tastes. The fuck do you want me to do? Throw him out? Just ignore cyborg Hitler. He's having dinner with Robocop. Fuck it, Terminator is there too.

Lost my place now.

My enlightenment felt like that sort of revelation—like a caveman instantly gaining all knowledge about the space age. It would fuck them up. It was too big for my level of society. My understanding of my place in the world just couldn't hold all that information. Couldn't hold it in my human brain. I don't think it's a brain thing. I think it's a consciousness thing. It was very scary and alienating sometimes frankly. Like a wizard who had been forced out of his tower by his wizard mom. I had nothing to hold on to. So I let go.

I won't lie to you. If I am enlightened, I'm pretty sure that's, like, a rule.

Did you even notice there was no Chapter 3? There just is no Chapter 3 in this book. Isn't that fucking wild? This book is like a 5D visit to the key cutters. No one's ever done this in the history of books. Please don't check that.

This isn't your grandma's book... it is a book, right? It's just a book? It's not some kind of positivity-fueled Ring videotape that kills you after 7 days? It just makes you, like, infinitely stronger with zero repercussions? Oh cool. See? I'm your bro, dude, I promise.

This isn't a cult. I don't give a fuck what you do. I just want you to be happy. I love this Universe and I want you to, too. Don't fuck with other people. If you end up being able to lift cars, even better. That's pretty much it. That's the scam.

I don't know what any of that shit we just saw means. Could be the ramblings of a madman. But I kinda like it. Kinda empowering. Why wouldn't I be the main character in my own life? Maybe I can make other main characters too? I stare at you intently. Sizing you up. Well, one of my eyes does.

I'm as close to crazy as you can get without getting wet. Just standing at the edge, dipping my toe in. Why wouldn't my higher self be an absolute legend too? They're me. Probably organized this whole fucking thing. Surfing the waves of the unknown and trying new hobbies. Classic higher-dimensional prank.

Oh fuck, I spilled the entire bottle of Intuition in there! Ew, it's like sensing the environment. Is it supposed to do that? What do you mean, "Kill it"? Why's it crawling out of the pot, oh my god, what the fu- !?

There might be some truth in all those ramblings. But we're going to have to break it down a bit, I think. Might even learn to write a book along the way. A hero's journey.

We might get to that whole cancer on Earth thing eventually. Editor's note: He won't. At the end of the day, we're all the same thing, so whatever that "thing" is, it's just playing its part. Don't actually go after it. I don't condone violence. I dunno what you'd even do—it's probably just some sort of evil cloud that facilitates growth. Virtually un-stabbable. You'd need a steel chair or something for that bad boy.

Ultimately, that section was likely written to be found carved into a cave after the next cataclysm. That's how we got INSERT NON-OFFENSIVE RELIGION after all. I wouldn't worry about it. Just enjoy the ride, baby.

If I'm being honest with you, I do want to enlighten the planet. I do want a golden age for the earth. This shit is cool as hell. I figure I only need to enlighten one nerd, and we're off to the stars, baby. They only have to read it by accident. So I thought about it: I'm lazy. How could I defeat evil in one fell swoop? Which domino should I choose to kick it all off?

Well, if every point is as good as any other in this crazy ball of string, I thought I'd start with **you**.

I let it hang in the air as I just sort of start humming the theme from Rawhide.

We make our way around a passed-out suit of armor. Presumably, there's a guy in there. But you never know. WOAH! Sorry, I thought it moved. Dunno why that scared me. Moving on.

When I wrote that text, I was overwhelmed with emotion. Way stronger than I think is normal for a human. And I already felt more deeply than other people, I think. If emotions had a scale, we'd been living with it turned down to a 2, and suddenly it was cranked up to a 9.5. Was it all bullshit? Did my brain just invent it for a laugh? What's scarier is that I don't think it was bullshit.

I think it was realer than real.

That's the funny part. It's almost like reality itself is a twisted version of what it's supposed to be, and no one notices. Some people notice, and they produce stuff like whatever the hell that text was.

It pretty succinctly explains what it felt like to experience what I went through. I was everything but still me somehow. I had some new perspective on the world. Like being slightly taller one day. Very cool, but also insanely fucking hard to explain. Apparently, I had decided to scale some sort of quantum hypermountain, and I'd made my climbing gear out of licorice.

Maybe that's why people who go through this tend to break. Unless they have a solid meditative or spiritual background. They fucking blow up. It's also tough wanting to help everyone around you but having no idea where to start—or even what to say. I had this knowledge to share, but I'd lost the ability to speak. Not ideal. I'm sure you can relate to that dear reader.

And again, I'm not claiming to be the fucking pope or anything. It feels like we live in a peaceful-ish village, and I've just come barreling into the town hall like, "YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHERE I'VE BEEN!" Describing some insane shit that no one cares about. But it happened, so what do you do?

If you love the sound of your own voice like I do, you force it into a sort of book-shaped pretzel made of indomitable human spirit. Maybe you'd like to write, or draw, or paint, or dance—anything that does something productive

for the greater whole. I don't know why that's important, but it is. Art's fucking rad.

Clearly, this wasn't some serene moment of sitting under a tree meditating. I was mopping a floor—listening to the Goonies soundtrack—and suddenly, I'm envisioning a golden age and shredding the fabric of reality like Jimi Hendrix.

I'm still in that groggy state almost, like waking up from a nap where everything feels slightly off. It isn't off—it's perfect, but it feels weird. Maybe that's because I was finally feeling normal, literally for the first time in my life. Maybe I could see through the bullshit now. Uncontrollably, almost.

I told the CEO of my company to take a pay cut to their face when they started going on about pay cuts. They're a great person now that I know them, but I seem to be inexplicably drawn to putting my foot in my mouth. I'm basically a janitor, remember. And this was my second month at the company. Or later—time is absolutely fucked for me now, I swear to god.

But it feels like I was the only one in my area like this. Everyone else was still asleep. They couldn't understand me. Like, you don't usually see random people just enlighten. They generally write books because it's REALLY FUCKING WEIRD. Shout out to my homie Tolle.

So basically, enlightenment was just the moment I realized there's another peak after I thought I'd reached the top of the mountain. And I wanted to share the view. A new perspective to live with. I got a little spiritual taste of the pie? It's all just a continuing journey. But that's okay, because it turns out I love climbing mountains. I suspect you might too.

I skipped Everest because it looked too easy. That hypermountain thing would have been great here, but as we'll see, things don't always happen in the order we think they should. And sometimes, they look different on reflection. Whoops, wisdom!

This isn't something you unpack with a logical mind unfortunately. It's different for everyone. Maybe my own trip down the cosmic toilet will help you on your own journey? Who knows. We're going to do it anyway, because, well, it's fun

as fuck. And apparently, I like puzzles as we've seen. And we're humans, so we use words to convey meaning—we've got to at least try. Or not try. It's all the same, I think.

We can fuck about until the answers just sort of come to us. That's my modus operandi. Keep your eyes peeled for the door, it's definitely here somewhere. Behind that witch coven playing limbo?

Was this my burning bush moment? A psychotic episode? A mind control weapon? Or just my version of enlightenment? I dunno. I still feel pretty normal, so who knows? I still have my pog collection, and that's really all that matters.

Enlightenment's cool, but you know what's cooler? Slamming pogs like it's 1996.

Anyway, I see the exit coming up. We sniff the air.

Smells like a lesson out there.

Chapter 5: Has Pogo Ever Killed Anyone?

We make our way out through the saloon-style doors (it was all one smooth transition, even though I was talking for ages. Don't think about it. Maybe it was like bullet time. Actually, that's good. Hey, write that down, me) into a warm, clear night.

Under a suspiciously beautiful, otherworldly sky, our feet crunch and kick up little clouds of dust as we walk toward some parked cars. You already know the elephant with the cart behind it is mine without me saying anything. Of course, the elephant's got a little fucking hat on. Jesus Christ.

Editor's Note: Eagle-eyed spiritual seekers might spot Nalagiri, the once-mad, now-enlightened ride from the Buddha vs. Demon saga. Excelsior!

I hold up my key, and you hear the unmistakable chirp of a car unlocking. We hop into the cart—more like a sofa with wheels—and the elephant starts to trundle out of the car park. *"X Gon' Give It to Ya"* starts playing from somewhere, shattering most of the parked cars' windows as we roll onto one of those long, endless American desert highways. I've got one arm lazily stretched before me. Kicking back. 4 mph, easy. There's no wheel.

We watch something that might be birds dive up and snatch stars from the sky as we drift along in comfortable silence. Again, I really do love your company. I don't have many friends. You probably know why. But I'm always looking for more. Not in a creepy collector way, but in a genuine, long-lasting fucking *Lord of the Rings* way. Merry and Pippin could literally get married, and neither of them are gay, but it would make complete sense. That's the world I want to live in. Where bros can marry bros and form a friendship coalition. Is that copyright safe? I'm using gender neutral 'bro' in this book by the way, you're a cloud of ectoplasm to me. Love ya bud.

Speaking of drifting... like most people, I thought I was my thoughts. I mean, why wouldn't I? They're near constant for me, like they are for most people—I

was just a regular human bean after all (intentional). But as we saw in Chapter 2, all that useless human shit was fucking vaporized, son.

So what's that like? Hard to say. Hmmm. It comes and goes, to be completely honest with you.

"Take Pogo here, for example," I say out loud, gesturing at the elephant. You fucking jump—most of this was telepathic before. You didn't know you were telepathic? The things I say don't actually line up with my mouth movements. It's subtle, but I'm getting distracted. "Most people think they're just their thoughts. Why wouldn't you? Thoughts make you who you are, right? Go here, do this, don't like rain, sexy sexy, I like blue cars, etc." I gesture again, mostly to break up the talking.

"I'm the thoughts, the sense of self, and Pogo's the awareness. I think I'm driving this whole thing, but Pogo? Pogo's been steering this whole time, watching me act like I'm in control. Hell, I've got my hand on the wheel, don't I? Oh wait... there's no wheel." I jerk the imaginary wheel to avoid a pothole. Pogo just keeps going straight. There was no pothole. I made it up.

But here's the rub—Pogo's been asleep this whole time. Or not exactly asleep, more like just watching. Look at him, the lazy fuck. What's he planning? Is he evil? Not necessarily. The only thing we know for sure is that his hat is wildly out of date. He's been on autopilot so long, we both think I'm running the show. "Hey, Pogo! Hey, fuck you! Pogo!" He's just absorbing everything in the background, biding his time. Chilling. Menacingly.

Obviously not really. Your own awareness/consciousness/soul will probably be chill. This is just a metaphor.

One day, though, when Pogo wakes up and decides he's had enough and needs to get back to his wife and kids, I'm gonna realize real fucking quick who's steering this elephant.

Losing my sense of self was a bit like that. You're the elephant. Rip that band-aid off now, you little bitch. One moment my sense of self/thoughts were there, and the next they were gone. I still had access to the original flavor, but it wasn't

the same after I tasted *Consciousness: Mountain Dew Baja Blast Edition.* I only have thoughts when I want them now. The elephant had bolted.

So, what the fuck are human beings? Hate to break it to you, but in my esteemed opinion, the brain's just a giga-powerful meat computer. Thoughts go in, thoughts come out. That's the character you're playing—the role you think of as your life. The game you're playing. Sorry if that feels like a gut punch, but it's true.

Doesn't make life any less real. It's real as fuck—that's the whole point. But when you do weird shit—like astral projecting to Alpha Centauri, or remote viewing every government bathroom on the eastern seaboard—it's not your brain doing the flying, is it? It's the awareness behind it all.

You are that awareness. That's the real you. Your consciousness. Your soul. Whatever you want to call it. As you keep moving along this wacky journey, your sense of self will shift. You'll stop thinking you're the thoughts and start realizing you're the awareness behind the thoughts.

And when you flip that switch? Shit gets spicy. Sometimes way too spicy. Guess you'll get the shits.

I dunno, maybe think of it as ghost technology or something. You are a ghost haunting a sophisticated meat suit. The suit has a computer in it to help the suit survive. It was such a good computer, and it had such a good autopilot that you fell asleep. The suit decided orange was your favorite color. Does that help? You're shaking your head. Alright, moving on.

But don't get spooked. I'm still me. Somehow. Same goofy asshole. Just minus the dead weight of 'me.' Going through this burns away all the crap that doesn't matter. Yeah, it's painful. Burn the bullshit and keep the good shit.

I'll probably be saying this a lot, but I feel like I genuinely have no idea what I'm doing. I don't feel different. I feel like the same person. But clearly, I'm more now. It's fun, in a *James Bond skateboarding down a cable car avalanche while having kung fu downloaded into his brain,* kind of way. Like, it's wild and exciting, but let's be realistic here: when you swap out James Bond for a

normal guy with none of the training, there's a real possibility that it will all get absolutely fucked. I'm deeply terrified at times. No bullshit.

You can imagine M, back in the control room, incandescent with rage, trying to figure out why some random dude is now responsible for saving the princess of Zimbabwe. Why was I given this cosmic insight? It's like giving a bazooka to a baby. Except, on the other hand, it feels like I'm trying to tell you that we were never the baby—we were actually always the bazooka, just with a diaper strapped to it.

This state is sustainable, though. Supremely chill. I still can't explain how I'm thinking without thinking, so I'll just asspull this: The greater part of human consciousness is probably kicking it in a higher dimension, doing all the real work. It's writing this damn book for me.

After this happens, you'll catch a falling beer before anyone realizes it dropped. Before *you* realize it dropped. Jedi shit. You could pod-race if you wanted to. Fuck owning an Audi.

I flip a switch on the dashboard. Window wipers? No. Got it. *Tick Tick Boom* starts playing. I crank it.

With absolutely no segue, you hear a muffled "Fuck you!" in the distance. It's the other Yous from alternate realities. Great. Their narrators are all trying to write books too. Look at those handsome bastards. Dozens of them. They all pierced the veil and think they're hot shit now. Most of them haven't processed their internal traumas. Amateurs. They're all from shit hole timelines!

We gotta book it, I say to you, as I point. One of them has a mohawk.

Hold on to your butt, kid—I floor it.

Rubber burns and the asphalt cracks as Pogo lets loose the dogs of war. Dozens of carts come down on us like a herd of berserk vending machines, each trying to get to their own Chapter 6. Carts smashing into each other, absurd metaphors left in their wake. Some of the other yous are waving at you. That's nice.

One stands out from the chaos—a version of me with a wild, bright green mohawk, leaning over the edge of his cart with a crazed grin plastered across his face. He's not like the others. He aint got no reader. This one looks... unhinged. His cart, pulled by a giant snake, veers dangerously close, and we catch a glimpse of his eyes—wild, burning with something darker than Narratorly madness.

This fuckers not here to play; he's here to win, whatever that means. He locks eyes with me for a split second, and I know this isn't the last time we'll cross paths. "I'll see you at the end, bitch!" he screams, before swerving off into the madness cackling. A chill runs down my spine. We're all versions of the same consciousness, but that guy? He's a fucking arsehole.

Uh oh. They've spotted an authority figure Narrator. Professor, maybe? Doesn't matter. I shove you down into the seat as Narrators slam into us from all sides, trying to ram us off the road in an attempt to destroy the threat. "You'll never take us alive, coppers!" they scream. Leather's flying, the cart's shaking, and I'm spinning the wheel like a maniac.

"Hey," I shout calmly at you, squinting down the barrel of my crossbow, carefully lining up the shot as the professor flails in the distance. "I always thought the movie *Shronk* was, like, weirdly fucking poignant, y'know? That dude really speaks to me. We all just want to be loved."

I adjust my aim slightly, keeping my tone conversational. Hands still on the wheel. Screaming. "Must've watched it a hundred times. And the horse? A talking horse? That's some wild shit, man. Wild. Shit."

I pause, the bow now perfectly steady. Leather and metal are still screeching around us. A piece just cut my fucking face—did you see that? I don't flinch. I rub my trigger finger over the little mop I carved into the wood.

Then, without missing a beat, I casually toss the crossbow to you.

"Take the shot."

The world around us stills. The weight of the weapon surprises you—it's heavier than you expected, grounding you in this bizarre reality. You look at me, maybe

for reassurance, but I'm too busy spinning the non-existent wheel, grinning like a maniac. Time stretches as you pull the trigger. The bolt wiggles through the air in slow motion, slicing through the chaos of crashing carts and screaming Narrators.

Your breath thunders. Everything else fades into the background, just you, the bolt, and the professor. And then—thud. It hits him square in the chest, and his entire being shudders, glitching out of existence like an old video game. You barely have time to process it before I'm slapping you on the back. "Nice shot old boy!" I say, but we both know this game's far from over.

There's no time to celebrate. More Narrators are closing in, their carts smashing into each other like a deranged demolition derby of existential crises. The air around us crackles as the road ahead blows open like the universe itself is splitting, a gaping chasm forming before us.

"Hold on!" I shout, gripping the non-existent steering wheel tighter. Pogo, as usual, is unbothered, his little hat perched perfectly as we thunder toward the edge of the void. The other Narrators are catching up, but they're not going to make it in time. No nitrous.

Just as we're about to plunge into the abyss, Pogo jumps. Not just a little hop—no, Pogo launches himself into the air like a vimana elephant rocket, leaving the other Narrators scrambling behind us. We soar over the chasm, the world below us warping into a swirling vortex of colors and shapes that make no sense.

It feels like we're flying for ages, suspended between dimensions, reality bending and twisting around us like a kaleidoscope on crack.

The other Narrators fade away behind us. Some of them turn inside out and shit like that. Show-offs. Off to discover their own infinite timelines, no doubt. You wonder what their books are like. Do their Narrators know how to write a book? You don't even like elephants.

One of the other yous waves as he fades. What's that guy's fucking problem?

Finally, Pogo lands with a gentle thud on the other side, the chasm sealing up behind us with a noise like someone dropped a harp. The chaos of the other Narrators dissolves, their shouts and crashing carts swallowed by the void.

We slow down, the world returning to some semblance of normalcy—or as normal as things ever get around me. The stars are still out, the road stretches ahead, and the music's still blasting, though it's switched to something chill now, like motorhead.

I glance over at you. You're gripping the seat, your knuckles white, eyes wide, like you're still processing what just happened. I give you a grin. Tuesdays, right?

You didn't really understand what just happened, but you're starting to get used to that feeling. Was that all pointless? Probably. Someone fucking died. But Pogo had our backs. All the Pogos are cool? Neat. It's days like this I love being alive. Nice to share it with someone. It's all about the connections dude. You can integrate the lessons later.

The cart bumps over a brick, jolting us back to reality—or whatever the hell this is. Hey, if you're reading this on some kind of hologram in the future, fuck you! We had it rough back in the day when we didn't even know how reality functioned. "Oh, the laser we take to the orgy is down for maintenance!" Fucking brick in the road. We could have died. I swear.

More aware now, you tune out my rambling. It was just a brick, dude. Pogo's fine. Always watching. Cool hat, though. I'm still going on about hyperdimensional intergalactic fuckwads standing around with their dicks in their hands.

You hear a spooky wailing sound in the distance, followed by the unmistakable clatter of bartering and sales. That was definitely the sound of a complete Michael Jordan pog collection being bought. Unmistakable.

You peek around the side of the elephant and see a massive, ramshackle tent city materialize out of nowhere.

Well, not nowhere. Everything's somewhere. So now it's here. Life's like that, you know?

Shadowy figures move in and out like ghostly ATM receipts. Or white farts. Maybe we look like farts on a ghost planet. Ever think about that, you smart bastard?

I'm also leaning over the cart's edge now. "Oh, thank God you can see that tent thing too, right?" I ask, remembering you were even here.

You nod. Is that all you do? Fuck me, it's like talking to a brick wall. If I can teach you, I can teach anyone. That's my hero's journey. What are you trying to get out of this? Prick.

As we roll closer, the tent city unfolds before us like some twisted carnivale from another world. Stalls made of shimmering, tattered fabrics stretch into the distance, each one manned by shadowy figures, their faces obscured by hoods or strange, glowing masks.

The air hums with the sound of bartering, the gurgle of strange currencies, and an eerie wailing that sends a shiver down our spines. "This place always gives me the fucking creeps," I say, still leaning over the cart's edge. "But I've picked up some wild stuff here. New words, a better sense of time... once, I even traded for a handful of memories that weren't mine." You spot one stall in the distance piled high with strange, glowing objects—bicycles? No, not quite. You can't help but wonder what this place is really selling. But whatever it is, it's clearly not just stuff.

I sniff the air. Taste it. Hold up a finger. The long one. Index, I think. Ssshhhhh. I sort of push it toward your head. "We're approaching the market." I say unnecessarily.

You brought money, right? Oh, of course not. Fine, I'll cover you. Again. But I also need to pick up a few new words for my vocabulary, so we'll make it quick. Keep your eyes open for anyone selling "cosmic"—I could use a better version of that one.

Chapter 6: The Mar-

We're actually back in the pub again. Don't worry, we're here before everyone freaked out. Look, there you are—hold this mop for a second. It had no significance whatsoever in Chapter 2. You probably thought you were going to, like, learn a bunch of shit, and I'd bequeath you my mop like fucking Obi-Wan? Did you want me to do an Obi-Wan?

That sounds fucking boring. You already are Obi-Wan. Maybe start acting like it?

Grab us more booze Obi Dobi. Half off ambrosia? Forty? Did you say forty? Fuck me. No, just grab the booze, dude, c'mon. The green ones. I watch you claw an arm full of bottles as I shotgun a pocket of slime into the shit behind the bar. Transactions give me anxiety. I don't know why. Lots of things give me anxiety to be honest. You just learn to live with it.

The second the slime hits the bottles, something... shifts. The pub starts to shimmer, like it's made of liquid light. Tables bounce, chairs stretch, and the patrons start elongating into infinity. Somewhere between 3 and 14 bottles behind the bar explode as the slime breaches the various containers. The unholy concoction melts a sizable hole in the fabric of reality. Daylight robbery.

Punch it.

You just stare blankly as the room warps around us, probably wondering why you're still holding that fucking mop. A symbol. A gesture. A weapon? Like it's the key to unlocking the universe? Yeah, no. It's literally just a mop. You can drop it now bud.

Your vision dims. Stars swirl into a vortex of light, stretching farther than your mind can handle. Stretching. Streeeeeeetching.

We warp away at lightspeed. And I make Chewbacca noises to fuck with you.

Chapter 7: The Day Before Two Days After Enlightenment: What the Fuck Do I Do Now?

Oh weird. Did you touch the fucking wheel? We're in some kind of void. Can you see my hands? No? Shit, where are my pogs? It's an earlier draft of a chapter. How the fuck did this get in here?

We're drifting. Floating? I don't know what's happening right now, but I'm sure I've felt it before. Like when you realize you've woken up but haven't opened your eyes yet. Kind of like that, but in book form. I think.

What the fuck do we do now? Running out of space here, but I'm confident that we'll surv—

Before enlightenment, chop wood; carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood; carry water.

This is a super famous line that basically just says, "deal with it." No matter how awakened you are, life still goes on. But let me break it down for you, dear reader.

I send you to the shop to get me more milk for my vodka. While you pretend not to look at the inexplicably still-present porno mags (seriously, who the fuck is buying them?), you see a shadow out of the corner of your eye. No, not a shadow—a blackness. In the shape of a human. It's cold. It turns to you and tilts its head before fading away.

Before enlightenment, this would probably be an extremely terrifying experience. Don't even lie to yourself while reading this—if you just randomly experienced this, you'd be more rattled than you've ever been before. It's the sheer otherworldly weirdness of it.

But after enlightenment, you simply realize that this guy was also just out to buy some milk.

FUCK! We're alive! Where the hell are we? Supermarket? Milk aisle? And... who's this guy? He looks familiar... oh. Oh, shit. It's me. Buying milk. Or is it you? Or both of us? I'm fading!

I'm not saying enlightenment opens your third eye and lets you see spirits and things... but I am saying that, because it can fucking do that. Basically, just deal with it. There's other shit you don't understand, and sometimes you see it buying its milk.

That explains like 90 percent of "scary shit," by the way, because it does happen—but we'll get into that later. Or we won't. I mean, you know me, I'm insanely high right now.

The world around you changes, and you change with it—whether you like it or not, and whether you know it or not. You still have to go to work. Whatever work is. Hopefully Star Trek freaky spiritual golden timeline. Even if you're enlightened. Even if you see shadow guys buying their milk. You might end up saving more insects than you're used to, and things like that, but ideally, it'll be basically the same. At the same time, though, it's completely new and different. You just hadn't seen it before.

Maybe you save more insects now. Maybe you start recycling more, or you hold the door for strangers. It's not that the world has changed—it's that you've started seeing it differently, like you're noticing all the small connections you missed before. Every moment is potentially extremely profound, and potentially a grand adventure.

You shouldn't be crying while listening to *Scatman* on the radio, but with the weight of the universe turning behind it, it just fucking hits different. I swear to god, I've had days where mopping floors felt like performing a sold-out rock concert. To me, it was one of the most amazing things a person could experience. And why wouldn't it be?

Fuck everyone else. I'll show them what they're missing.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

There isn't much to say. I think you just have to be it.

Enlightened.

NOT milk.

The void cracks open like an old DVD player jammed with popcorn crumbs. A DVD is like a pog, but it had movies on it instead of Pikachus. Sometimes they had weird shitty video games for grandparents to buy accidentally.

We made it. Oh thank god. Reader? READER? Oh hey. Yeah, I do that joke twice in one book. Call the comedy cops—I don't give a fuck.

Alright, on we go. I can't even remember where the fuck we were going now. But maybe that's the point. All roads, no matter how twisty, lead somewhere. Maybe to enlightenment. Maybe to the milk aisle. Same difference, really. Just keep walking, dear reader. I'll hold your hand.

Chapter 8: Remember Pogs?

Wait, where the fuck are we? Oh right—the Market. Nailed it.

Fabric stretches before us like a door made of, well, fabric. Muffled screaming can be heard. I pull a threadbare curtain to the side, revealing a sort of Arabian Las Vegas that exists in multiple dimensions at once. Immediately, you're completely blind, you've got third-degree sunburns, and—oh shit—you're now in debt.

"Oh fuck. Sorry about that," I say, taking off my shades. There's another pair underneath. I gingerly step over whatever is leaking out of you as I slide the shades onto you and wipe your face with a wet paper towel. You're good as new. And you were. Somewhere, Jesus gets goosebumps back in the pub. *Who does this fucking guy think he is?*

"Forgot I exist outside of all that bullshit now," I say, helping you to your feet. "You're a little too asleep to handle seeing it as is. That's why your eyes melted. And why you somehow own a speedboat now. Humans, man. Extremely susceptible to wanting shit. Anyway, the shades will help you comprehend things and attract babes."

By now, you've somehow bought three coffee makers and a pair of jeans with pre-existing holes in them.

"I think there are bigger issues we could be focusing on, but humans really love highly addictive, collectible discs. So here we are. Chapter 8. Remember pogs?" Plus the book might be here, you cleverly remind me. Thanks.

I pull the curtain aside again. You flinch.

"Did you just fucking flinch?"

We step through, entering a place that makes the pub look like the sleepy English cottage it was pretending to be.

While I told you this cognito-hazard exists in multiple dimensions at once, and the glasses should help... it's hard to tell if they're actually working. There's just *stuff* happening everywhere. It's overwhelming. Your eyes feel like breaded shrimp in a paint mixer. You're a bit sick. Maybe buying one thing will help.

I can't even get most of this shit down on the page. We don't have the letters for it yet.

It's like one of those morphing 5D hypercubes you see in nerd books—except instead of theoretical geometry, this is a giga-market selling pogs, emotions, ideas, burgers, and even selves from every reality. Yeah, you can pick up a self here. Where do you think yours came from, dumbass? They gave you a receipt, and it even tells you your attributes. I think they call it astrology?

Oh, you thought astrology was bullshit? That's embarrassing, dude. What, do you think Bigfoot's bullshit too? Do something useful and let me know if you see someone selling samurai swords.

Anyway, it looked a bit like that.

I take your hand, and we float out amongst the chaos. Fuck, your hand is soft. Ain't no floor here, so hold on tight. If you fall in there I'm not diving in. Not again.

Here's the thing: humans are wild about attachment. Not just emotional attachment—though that's a biggie—but to stuff. Physical crap that doesn't even matter. See those jeans you just bought? You didn't need those. Do you see me wearing trousers? No. They're the kind with holes in them already, like you paid extra for a broken toy. But the second you hold them, bam—attachment. You think they're part of your identity now. You're the guy who wears a leather jacket. Next thing you know, you're having a full-blown existential crisis because you got someone else's blood on the jeans, and suddenly you're naked in more ways than one.

That's attachment, baby. Welcome to the suck.

This whole place is built on attachment. Pogs? Remember pogs? No one needed pogs, but man, people acted like those shitty disks held the secrets of

the universe. Same thing here—this market? It's a giant maze of crap you don't need, but you'll convince yourself it's essential the moment you touch it.

As if to illustrate my point, you spot a sentient walnut creature checking out some dirty gym socks at a market stall just below you. Or above you. Perspective's weird here. What's she up to? It's definitely a sex thing. She grabs a sock, hands over some gold, and lets out a shriek of ecstasy. Yup, sex thing.

You watch as she slowly drifts downward into physical reality, heavier now. Still huffing.

"That says it all, doesn't it?" I say, peering after her. She's really picking up speed.

That's attachment. You hold onto stuff—ideas, people, emotions—thinking they complete you, but they just fill a hole you haven't dealt with. It's all just cosmic pogs, my dude. The things we cling to are as replaceable as whatever's on sale at this market.

So go on, buy another coffee maker. Maybe it'll finally make you feel whole. Spoiler alert: it won't. But hey, at least you'll have four of them now.

You wanna know how to get over attachment? Let go. That's it. Seriously. No secret sauce, no 30-day guided meditation, no mystical ritual where you chant under the moon while burning sage and wearing Crocs. You just... stop holding on.

It's like a game of Hot Potato. You're holding onto the potato for way too long, it's burning your hands, and everyone else is telling you to drop it. But no, you've decided this potato is part of your identity now. It's your potato, damn it, and you'll take it to the grave.

But the secret to life? Stop holding onto the fucking potato. Just drop it.

And sure, easier said than done, right? You've spent years building your life around your potato collection—whether that's your job, your ego, your Starbucks order, or the idea that you're never wrong—and suddenly I'm over here telling you to just drop it. But think about it: once you do, what happens?

Absolutely fuck all, man. You just have two free hands to pick up... something else. Or nothing at all.

Shit, maybe you don't need to hold onto *anything*. Maybe you're enough without a potato.

Letting go of attachment doesn't mean you stop caring about stuff. If anything, it makes you care **more**. It's not about becoming some zen master immune to material things (though, props if you pull that off). It's about realizing you don't **need** those things to define you. You're already you—even without the pog collection or the emotional baggage you've been dragging around.

"But *I* still love stuff, you know? Like, I've got a collection of weird mugs and I'm obsessed with dumb shit like medieval weaponry. But if I lost them, I wouldn't care. I love them, but I don't *need* them. It's all about the balance. Enlightenment seems to automatically remove all those attachments for you, at least temporarily."

We drift upwards, leaving far behind the sentient walnut and her sock-sniffing habits. You can't help but look down at the market—there's a stall selling bottled epiphanies, another one offering half-off self-worth for those who buy in bulk. Some sort of gelatinous blob creature is desperately haggling over an old VHS tape of *Titanic*, which, for whatever reason, has become his entire identity. He's literally screaming.

"See?" I say, nodding toward the blob. "That's what attachment looks like. You think you need something, build your entire sense of self around it, and next thing you know, you're negotiating for a movie from 1997 that only makes you cry. Fuck icebergs."

The blob scores a deal. I shake my head.

It's all pointless, really. Just pogs in different shapes.

You touch your sunglasses—they were cool for a minute, but now they're starting to feel heavy. Like maybe they were never actually part of you, but something you thought you needed. Maybe you don't need four coffee makers after all.

Then it hits you: let go.

It's not some grand revelation; it's simple. Just put down the shit you've been clinging to. Release the need for stuff, for validation, for the things you thought defined you.

We drift upwards.

Attachment's like mopping the floor with mud—you're not fixing the problem, you're just spreading it around. Put down the mop.

Fuck. I forgot to buy a sword. You know what? Screw it. I'm not trudging back through the interdimensional sock vortex just for a sword. Maybe next time.

Chapter 9: Alien

We pop out of some marshmallows that look like clouds and float-walk our way to the ground. Don't worry, your precious jeans are dry. I just told you they were marshmallows.

As we come in for a landing, you catch a glimpse of what looks like a normal, boring earthly suburb. What the hell is the Narrator pulling here? You paid for the literary version of *Total Recall*, not a trip to fucking Arizona. You're about to give me a piece of your mind, but I've already returned it to the store and got a refund. I'm trying to write a book here.

It's actually kind of nice down on the grass, you think. It's warm. There's a tree. Wow, America really does have it all, doesn't it? Endless, identical houses as far as the eye can see. You almost feel calm for a second.

I thumb over my shoulder at the house behind us, and we mosey over. There are lawn gnomes—little green idiots tearing up the yard. I wave my arms like a madman, but those greasy bastards are fast—astral gnomes always are. They vanish into the shadows on all fours, chittering about god-knows-what. Interest rates, probably.

Alright, that was clearly weird, I mutter, wandering back over to you like nothing happened. What? Fine.

We're in a place you'd probably call the astral realm. Here to meet a friend of mine. Don't ask me what kind of astral realm—I don't know. But it's also Earth. Like, literally your Earth. You never think about the weird stuff around here, do you? If I told you about some gross fish that lived in the deepest reaches of the ocean, you wouldn't be surprised, right? This place is just an ocean around Earth you didn't even know about—full of weird fish. And people. I guess. It's ok to be nervous, but he's cool.

To prove my point, I hurl my chocolate milk and vodka at the front door. The liquid just stays in the glass, acting like a brick. The doorbell rings.

You start to feel something—a tingle over your skin like the wind gently kissing it. You glance at me. Should you be worried about this? Why am I scowling? It's getting stronger as whatever's inside approaches. You get full-body goosebumps. You can feel this guy reaching for the door handle.

The door swings open. A ten-foot-tall humanoid somehow steps onto the little porch. Why does this dude have a normal-sized door? Astral realm logic. He might be wearing a glittery jumpsuit—or that might just be his skin. You glance into his eyes and see the most beautiful nebulas of deep wisdom you've ever witnessed. This thing is ancient. And kind. Then your eyes land on his bowl cut. And stay there.

There's something unsettlingly familiar about him—like when you catch your reflection in a shop window and, for a second, don't recognize yourself. But taller. And with a shittier haircut.

The air around him bends, like space itself is struggling to contain him. Reality can't decide if he's matter or thought, so it awkwardly goes for both. And that bowl cut? Jesus Christ.

"Hello, Narrator," the tall man says warmly.

"Hello, Kevin," I say, craning my neck. "I told you that wig looks ridiculous."

Kevin's wig *does* look like shit you think. He glances at you.

Oh shit! Can he read this? Hey, Kevin, can you read this? Your wig looks like shit, and you're way too tall. Some sort of vein begins throbbing in Kevin's forehead.

You don't need a psychology degree to see what's going on here.

"Oh really, smart ass?" I say. "This is Kevin. He's me."

Did you see that coming? This alien dude is me. From the future. Or the past. Kevin's never really been clear on that. Ascended masters are like fucking magic eight balls—cryptic and kinda smug. Is he my fifth dimensional overlord? My higher self? Consciousness Russian dolls? Is it like that, Kev?

Kevin, as if reading your mind, winks and says, "I'm just here to... help." Cryptic as fuck.

He gestures for us to follow him inside. He knows we already know the answers or some other bullshit. God, this fucking nerd pisses me off. He smells great. *Gagh!*

You wipe your shoes on the welcome mat as I stomp into the house. When did I start smoking a cigarette? Kevin has disappeared, but you hear lemonade being made in the kitchen. You follow me into the living room and plop down next to me on the couch. It's just a normal living room. You hear someone mowing their lawn a few houses over. Probably some Lovecraftian nightmare using a lawnmower, right? I go for a high five.

You have no idea what I'm talking about.

Kevin reappears—literally just appears—a few feet away, still somehow ten feet tall. He sets some icy lemonade and glasses on the table. It's the kind of table you'd find in any suburban home—complete with a few magazines, an old bong, and a coaster that definitely doesn't get used. Yeah, it's mundane, but you know the drill by now: nothing here is just mundane.

Kevin serves the lemonade like he's handing over the Holy Grail. You stare at the bong, wondering if any of this is real—or if you're just really, really high.

Kevin's about to speak. I can feel it. You're not ready.

"Did you know that the movie *Shronk* was directly responsible for the creation of my species?" Kevin says, like that's a normal thing to say.

"Without *Shronk*, the universe would have collapsed under the weight of its own ignorance," Kevin continues, dead serious. "The ogre's journey mirrors the soul's path through all of creation."

I blink. You blink. Kevin doesn't blink.

"Without the all-star, I would not exist," he adds solemnly. "The ogre was the catalyst for all cosmic enlightenment." He pauses, hand forming a gesture that looks suspiciously like the Vulcan salute. "A talking horse. Unbelievable."

What the fuck is happening?

"*Shronk*... truly the Great Initiator," Kevin sighs.

I can't take it anymore. Fuck me, Kevin, we've reached peak *Shronk*. What else you got?

Kevin nods, completely unfazed. "Of course, none of this really matters in the grand scheme. I didn't bring you here to talk about ogres. This is about your journey—our journey. And I've made sure you can relive every moment."

"You may find all this overwhelming," Kevin says, "but don't worry. Every journey needs a guide. I'll make it so you can revisit these experiences whenever you desire. Something called... a book. Retro."

Kevin claps his hands, and a book materializes out of nowhere. He hands it to you. You can feel its weight even before you touch it.

"The *MOPINOMICON*," Kevin says, each syllable vibrating with cosmic significance. The name echoes through the astral suburbs. You stare down at it. Should you open it? Kevin just smiles.

You feel knowledge leaking out of the book, like someone left a *Jumanji* on overnight.

"Your guide to infinite enlightenment... and how to mop it all up afterward."

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

The book is fired through the cognitive realm, through the astral realm, through a Starbucks, and into your soul.

In your hands now lies the fate of the all. Or, you know, just some light reading. No pressure. Kevin nods, encouraging you to finish the thought.

You may have accidentally purchased a higher-dimensional enlightenment manual.

“And that wasn’t even the point of this chapter! Kevin, you’ve ruined the whole fucking thing. This was supposed to be about aliens, not *Shronk* and enlightenment manuals! You fucking gave us the book from the finale you absolute wanker!”

Kevin just shrugs. “Reality’s flexible around here,” he mutters, like he’s talking about the weather.

Of course, the fuckwit casually rewrote the universe like he’d been scratching his nonexistent balls.

Well, now what?

I take a breath, shaking my head. "Hang on, I need to check my fucking notes." I flip through an imaginary notebook for comedic effect, glancing at Kevin who’s just smirking with that too-knowing smile of his.

Alright. So, *the book* is in play early. Fine. Reality’s flexible. We’ll run with it.

I sigh, getting up from the couch. "But it’s still weird as hell that Kevin’s me. Just, uh... think about that quietly for like ten minutes or so."

“Would you like to watch shronk?”

SHUT. THE. FUCK. UP. Kevin! You absolutely fucked the whole thing!

Chapter 10: Ghosts and Guts

"Yeah, right in the middle of my **fucking** book. I know. I know. Awful. A *weasel*? Yeah, it does." I throw my hands up in frustration, mouthing sorry to you as I pace around. I cover my hand as I speak to you. "I had to call my other friend. This alien thing? Obviously isn't going to work out the way this is going. Give me a second. I need to organize this. Fucking love aliens."

Kevin watches you, silently polite, eyes gleaming with that weird, cosmic patience like he's waiting for you to finish rearranging the entire universe. I give him a half-hearted thumbs-up, but it's like he's not even looking at me. No, his eyes are fixed on you the whole time, like he's sizing you up for something... bigger. Maybe you should think about your journey so far.

Then, without a word, Kevin gets up. His ten-foot-tall frame moves across the room like he's parting clouds, gliding to the archway.

But then—he pauses. The long shadow of his gangly-ass figure stretches across the floor as he turns back to you. His eyes? That familiar shimmer of infinite wisdom.

"Before you go back," he says, his voice softer, lower. "Just remember—sometimes, it's not ghosts that haunt you. Sometimes, it's yourself." He lets that hang in the air, his gaze lingering a bit too long, like he's waiting for something to click. Then, almost as if he regrets saying it, Kevin adds, "The past... it's not as far behind you as you think."

For a split second, you swear you see something in his eyes—something almost broken. But like a switch, it's gone. And then Kevin? He slips out the door without another word, disappearing like he was never even there.

You hear Shronk begin to play from the next room.

"Shit. 20 minutes? Yeah, I can swing it. I know somewhere we can go but it's gonna suck." I hang up my finger phone with my alien buddies and turn to you with a grin, as if Shronk's swamp wisdom wasn't blasting on full volume.

Kevin's gone, probably in the middle of some spiritual deep-dive that'll take hours. Whatever. I like the guy but it's just hard to comprehend sometimes. A higher me? A future me? We'll figure it out later. Tie yourself in knots with this shit.

"Let's go check out my old house," I say, shrugging off the tension like it's no big deal. "Maybe we'll haunt it while we're there."

I throw on my jacket, and without another word, we head out. Because, you know, priorities.

Speaking of priorities, what's this book even about now, anyway? You don't know? Shit. I'll figure it out. Or not. Honestly, who cares? The balls just sort of rolling now. We're doing great. Bitch.

We step out onto the perfect grass and I grab your jacket in my fist. If you're not wearing a jacket, then I'm sorry, this will be really painful.

We fly up into the air like happy little Neos, our clothes rippling with the wind but nowhere near as much rippling as you would expect at these speeds. MOM JOKE REMOVED. We zoom through a couple of marshmallow clouds. *Goose*. The houses below form a lovely sort of brown smudge. **GOOSE**. I emergency roll us to the side with one of those *nyooooow* plane noises. You know the one. We level out. Goose is fine.

You're breathing like we just survived a car crash, but we both know I nailed it. Flying is odd. Feels weird, like you're just imagining something you've never actually experienced before. Like you and sex. Ha. You've never been in a vagina! Medically impossible for a natural-born. You're practically a scientific marvel—solid burn. That's for the goose incident. I'm the one with access to Ascended Steve Irwin documentaries. I'll handle the geese.

Heads up, my house is just ahead. How do I know at these speeds? Shades. It's always the shades.

We rocket down to the ground. My knees absorb the impact. Yours don't. Up you get, clumsy.

As I help you to your feet and dust you off, you get a look at the house in front of you.

It's a stone and wood rambler painted blue. The division between this house's dry yellow lawn and the neighbors' is impressively straight.

We hop up the front steps and straight through the closed door and into the living room.

When I lived here, I'd always see shadowy figures wandering around. In case you need me to spell it out, I was seeing the readers from this book. Literally. I'm not fucking around here, that's genuinely what I think those were, now that I wrote the book. That's how I recognized you in Chapter 1. You actually are my friend. Wow, crazy.

You get a brief look around a nice living room that clearly had none of the Narrator's input before voices draw your attention to the kitchen. I always thought there were way too many decorative pineapples in here. It's a man and a woman. We walk into the kitchen.

The woman leaves before you get a look at her, but the guy is still standing with his back to us. He spins around. It's me.

He's got a can of alcoholic seltzer in one hand and a massive joint in the other. Obviously cuts his own hair. He looks like he hasn't slept in days, and he's wearing a stained sweater with Santa on it, even though it's July. He's only wearing one shoe. He's also aggressively Scottish. Christ dude, it's 7 in the morning.

Don't worry, we just look like shadows to him.

The Narrator from the past narrows his eyes. "I can see you, dickhead," he says directly into the narrative.

He shouldn't be able to do that. The fuck.

The extremely drunk Past Narrator gestures for us to follow him back into the living room and just walks straight through us. He mumbles, “fuck you,” softly as he passes.

We follow him back through, and he’s already sitting on some well known furniture store monstrosity. The seltzer is crumpled on the floor, and he's got another one already in hand. Is there a mini fridge in here?

“Shut the fuck up,” the Narrator from the past says. “Don’t pretend you don’t know what's going on here. You're me. You remember this. We know our parts. So listen well.”

“Look at you. Fucking useless. Traipsing around on some grand adventure with your new buddy, eh? Still running? Couldn't handle reality so you just broke your mind and fell into a bottomless hole of madness. Ran away from it all. Well, good for you. Good for fucking you. A nice getaway in the sun. But I'm still here. I'll always be here. Cunt.”

You look at your Narrator. He’s staring at himself. His eyes are watering. Probably from the smoke. Must be a humdinger of a joke he's cooking up here. You're sure of it.

The Narrator from the past downs his can, crushes it, and beasts the joint in a single pull. The house twists and creaks around us. Smoke leaks from his unwashed mouth as he continues.

“You got cucked by your wife, dude.”

The Narrator rocks backward like he just got slugged.

“It took everything you had to open yourself up to the world, and look where it got you. You showed them the real you, and they crushed you under their boot like a fucking bug. You're useless. Worthless. Stupid. You can't even love yourself. How could anyone love you?”

The past Narrator lights another joint before speaking.

"You took the easy way out on that bridge and invented some spiritual bullshit to patch together your broken psyche."

I can't help but flash us back to a freeway overpass. You see the Narrator standing. Watching. Deciding. The grating voice brings us back.

"You couldn't even kill yourself, you piece of shit."

I want to say something—anything—but the words catch in my throat like a fucking stone. He's wrong. I know he's wrong. Right? But the way he says it, the confidence in his voice... it's like he's carved his words into my bones. My mind scrambles for a rebuttal. For proof. I've changed, I want to scream, but how? How have I changed? What have I done, really?

I try to say something—anything. "No, it wasn't like that," I manage to get out, my voice trembling. "I didn't run away. I... I changed. I wanted to help people. I wanted... to grow." The words sound weak even to me. My throat tightens as I scramble to find more, but they fizzle out before I can even form them.

He's not wrong, is he? No. No, I've grown. I've changed. I have, right? My mind races, searching for anything—that time I helped someone... no, that's not enough. What about when I...? Nothing. Just this silence. This gnawing emptiness.

The Narrators' voice cracks.

"It all happened the way it had to. There was nothing I could do. I had to do something. Someone needed me for something."

They needed me... didn't they?

My voice trails off into nothing.

We stare at each other, this silence between myself now thicker than blood.

The Past Narrator stands up suddenly.

The Present Narrator flinches.

"Who the fuck would ever need you?"

The Past Narrator tries to look himself in the eye, spits directly on the carpet in front of him, and leaves.

Past Narrator lunges forward on the way out and punches a shadow reader in the face, sending them tumbling back into the wall, smashing a wedding picture. They don't make a sound. Then, with a sneer, he mutters, "Sunglasses are fucking gay," before stomping back into the kitchen like nothing happened.

I just stand there for a minute. Breathing heavily.

A cold wind blows some dead leaves into the room as the front door softly swings off its hinges. The sound of it hitting the floor is deafening.

I avoid your eyes as you follow me out of the empty house. It feels cold outside now, and it's getting dark. Also, it's raining.

People think the hardest thing to deal with is the world around them. But the truth? It's yourself. Loving everything means loving the bad things, too—including yourself. I couldn't be me without him. I needed those lessons. Maybe that sounds like bullshit, but I obviously touched something profound, so to me, the suffering was worth it.

Could I learn and grow? Could I love again after all that?

I don't have anything to hide from you. I wanted you to see how broken I was. I wasn't a bad person. Just buried under suffering. I felt like it spread to others. So I felt guilty, and it all just magnified. Maybe you are broken too? There's no shame in it bud. Sometimes things break. And it's brutal as hell, but you have to choose to push through all that. It doesn't just magically happen. That's the hard part. Deciding to change. But I'm proof that it can be done. Believe me when I say if I can do it, ANYONE can fucking do it. You can be happy. And sad, but it won't bother you any more.

"I thought this chapter might show you where I came from. So we could better see our future." I catch myself glancing back at the house briefly. A lot happened in there. I force a grin at you, but you can tell. You can tell there's a storm inside me. You can tell how badly I want to just fucking cry.

"Talk about being your own worst enemy, huh?" I joke, but the words come out hollow. You chuckle, but we both know it wasn't funny. You're not sure what to do. A hug maybe?

"The Show Must Go On" starts playing.

And then there he is, the epitome of everything I used to be. Past Me, standing on the roof like some deranged guardian angel, flipping me off with one hand and... yeah, he's pissing with the other. Of course. Why not? Even now, he has to piss all over the moment. It's like fluorescent fucking green.

I try to laugh it off. But even with the jokes, I can't shake it. He's still there. That part of me—the part I thought I'd left behind—is still up there, watching. Mocking. And I have no idea what to do about it.

His piss drains away into the grass, turning the lawn into a tiny alien Amazon rainforest for the unsuspecting bugs.

I sigh and hold up my hand for a high five. You slap it, and we disappear with a plop. Time to see some real aliens.

Chapter 11: Aliens

I just saw a fucking bird fly by holding a slice of pizza. Completely unrelated to the book, but I needed to tell someone. I can't believe it. Holy shit. Talk about the universe having a sense of humor. Like, yeah, bad shit happens, but it's not all pointless. Here's a fucking pizza bird.

Cheer up, I say as we materialize on some tropical beach. Look around—pale sand, trees swaying (some of them on fire, but don't worry about it). I have a loving wife, man. I'm enlightened. Everything's fine. Everything's fucking great! Just gotta throw some tension in the book, you know? For the drama. *(It did feel real though. Too real. Almost convinced myself. But hey, this chapter's fun—I promise.)*

You splash around in the sea for a bit while I balance rocks. *OOOh almost had four stacked that time.* The water's warm, clear, not even gross at all. No dog shit, no needles, nothing. You probably haven't seen a beach this clean before, huh? Enjoy it, bud.

Don't touch that—it's not a dog. *No really, just stay still until it goes back into its burrow.*

Okay, you're safe. *You're safe!* Stop crying, dude.

"Keep your eyes on the sky" I say, pointing at the beautiful **green** sky. Whoooooooaaaaaah! We're on an alien planet, in case you didn't get it. I wave a hand and extinguish the tree fire, only just noticing it. Probably no park rangers here. No Yogi Bear, or whatever the hell that thing was. Whatever, it's fine. My guys will be here any second. They always show up when things get weird like this.

Some sort of white dot appears on the horizon and starts zipping around like a fucking bug. "Why are they like this*?"* I say to you. You're building a little sandcastle. They're so fucking weird, just fly in a straight line, you weirdos.

The dot stops. We stop. I don't have my distance sunglasses on—what's it doing?

Suddenly, the dot becomes a car-sized orb floating about 10 feet in front of us, over the sea.

We both shit ourselves, even though the orb made no noise, no shockwave, nothing. *You had your eyes closed—why did **you** jump?*

"I'll be honest with you, I thought they'd bring the impressive one at least" I say, tossing a rock at the oblong object. The rock is vaporized. This one doesn't even have any lights. E.T.? Now there's a guy who knows how to bedazzle a spaceship.

The orb just sits there as part of the seamless white shell opens up. It's a little door. Cute.

We float inside. *Look at you go, you just flew on your own. You're a fucking bad dude.*

Inside?

Huge.

Huge.

Huge.

The echo keeps going. But... wait. There's only one wall. That I can see, anyway. I rub some sort of hideously stained rag over my shades. How the hell does the echo work? It's just a bunch of weird alien pillars in here. No roof either. Where do they hang their paintings? Evolved beyond the need for walls, probably.

Alien tech, bro, I shrug. Seen it all before. We float on. Strangely calming though. Nice to get away from all that emotion.

Our heading? *That way.* I take a deep breath. You know what's coming. It's been way too long since I rambled.

Ponder this: If enlightenment is like a universal truth, wouldn't these experiences be known to aliens? Who are real by the way.

Of course, they would. That's why they're mentioned in **every ancient text known to man.**

Back in the pub, Jesus points to a book. He's pointing at a photograph of a classic grey alien painted on a rock. *"That's like four thousand years old,"* he says.

Did you think ancient stoners were just making this shit up? It was all real, you cheeky fucker. Well, *sort of.* Just because you weren't looking doesn't make it less true. It's like a snake on the road you run from, which turns out to just be a piece of rope. The rope's an alien or something?

All of the whacky shit I talk about? Absolutely real. At least in some form. The gods and angels and Sasquatch and whatever? It can all just be "aliens." If that's what's easier for you to process. The full picture? *Obviously* just bonkers, but I like thinking of it as aliens. At least at first.

I flip onto my back and try a few different swimming strokes as I talk. It's hard in a book; you don't have to fill up space as much in an actual conversation. I make a few fart noises as I do the frog stroke.

A lot of things aren't "aliens," though, which is apparently a naughty term these days. So let's call them *Non-Human People* or something. Not like a little guy in a flying car from another planet—*that* shit does happen, we're in his car now—but it's not that simple. Some of these entities don't have physical bodies like we do. Some are so different, we don't even have the imagination or words to describe them.

I switch back to the breaststroke. You're moonwalking now. *I like it.*

I'm not just talking out of my ass here—I've met these Non-Human People. Or I think I have. In dreams, mostly. But what are dreams anyway? Another dimension of reality? I'd put my money on it. If money wasn't a fucking SCAM. I don't even know why, I just know it's inherently evil.

Speaking of dreams, where do you think we are? Is this 'real life'? No, it's like a dream, or a book, or whatever. So just keep an open mind, I suppose. You shrug and point at a pillar. It's got some sort of weird arm growing out of it. Yeah, cool arm. Are you even listening to me?

You're nodding. Well, what do you think about all this? I love you, but I'm setting you up here, and you just... don't. It's too late now, it's a new paragraph. Blame literature.

So, what would you call these dudes? If it's exactly the same thing described in the Bible and it's ticking all the boxes—standing in your living room, telling you wild shit—is that not just an angel? By definition? Or a Jinn? Or a Pleiadian? Or a bodhisattva?

At what level of scientific explanation does that angel become a Non-Human Person and not an angel? Do you see what I mean? It's just a guy who shoots lasers from his eyes and knows how many heartbeats you have left before you die. And he might just tell you as well, because guess what? *He's a DICK.*

Because at the end of the day, they're all just people. Most of them are nice, sure. But there's nothing that says they *have* to be. Maybe it's 'evil,' maybe it's just having a bad day. We have **absolutely** no idea what we're doing. If it's infinite, who knows? Be street-smart. If the angel's offering you crack, it's not an angel.

We slowly orbit each other. *I hold my chin and cross one leg.* I dunno what you're doing 'cos I have my eyes closed.

How is this related to enlightenment? I can hear you asking. Well, it's an ongoing process, but essentially, my awareness itself was inflated to universal proportions. It isn't currently—what would be the point? But it is quite large. *You know what they say: big shoes, big awareness.* That part of people—the part that watches your thoughts—is usually not even considered.

In my opinion, it's the real thing you are. It's what connects to everything else. *That's your cup and string that connects to all the other cups.* That's your megaphone. That's the flashlight you shine out at all the other mirrors around

you. That was the part of me that remained after all the shit got blown away. I was still me, whatever that is.

Oh hang on, I'm getting a call. "Yeah, we're coming. *Your fucking entryway or whatever the hell this is—it's too big. It's way too fucking big*. Five minutes." I flick my hand closed. *Look at that thing*, I say, pointing at some sort of enormous beetle. It's just standing there like 200 yards away. A blue self aware liquid pours out of it and changes the year to 1512. *It's reproducing or something,* I tell you. You nod. *Why are you pretending you know what that is?*

How could you have seen one before? We keep on floating as I keep talking like nothing happened. You fucking piss me off sometimes, you know that?

Do you find it surprising that enlightenment would be possible for an 'alien'? Why wouldn't it be?

News flash, asshole—it's possible for you too. Anyone can do it. If life is always moving forward and enlightenment is a next step on that path, why the fuck would it only be monks and other nerds like that who achieve it?

There would be like six guys at the end of the human evolutionary chain, and it would fucking suck. How would that work? What would be the point? It seems more likely that *anyone* could do it. Maybe we just needed someone handsome enough to do the dirty work and drag you by the hand toward it.

I'm really struggling to break this up now. We're almost there. Push. Push. I'm not tricking you into learning, it's just a fun book.

Other beings with access to their own awareness—pretty much *everything*—would know what I knew. What others had known throughout history. There were other people out there. Not across an ocean of piss humanity kept pissing into, but an ocean of perception that was literally infinite and waiting.

Literally infinite.

Oh look, there's that rope again—maybe it'll guide us somewhere interesting. Sometimes the things you fear most can lead you right where you need to go. *Thanks, Mr. Rope!*

You look at me. Your face says that all sounded suspiciously rehearsed. It wasn't. That's just how I talk. Ask anyone—*I never shut up.*

Editor's Note: Mr. Rope is still wanted in over eight states and four continents. He's killed before. He is at large and extremely dangerous. Please contact authorities if you see the rope.

I curl up into a cannonball but keep my head up so I sort of look like a weird Yoda. You're just upside down now, revolving slowly. What the hell were we doing here? Oh right.

We're going to meet some of the kooky bastards I've encountered over the years. Non-Human People. You thought I was an interesting dude? They make me look like an A4 sheet of paper. *Sheeeeeeeit.* I stretch it out.

We finally reach the other wall. Did you see it coming up? I was talking. What was this room's purpose? The wall stretches out into the distance on either side until it fades into a mist. A nice-looking mist though, not like spooky forest mist.

We duck through another cute little doorway and find ourselves in an extremely cozy-looking room full of a bunch of weirdos.

You try to find a corner. *No, I can't see any either,* I say, glancing around the room to describe it to you. Well, it's certainly white. Or like an off-white color. There's recessed seating. What the hell, *everything's recessed.* There's a 70's fireplace hanging from the ceiling for some reason, but honestly, it's hard to tell with all the people here.

There's only a few of them, but everyone in this damn book is always popping here and there, existing in multiple dimensions at once. The astral realm is fucking whack. So there's like, seven or twelve people in the room. I'm not racist—it's just really hard to tell.

Mostly humanoid, with a couple of fan favorites: A grey, three bald guys in red latex, Buddha, a cloud (don't breathe her in—she's currently mustard gas, but she's trying, alright?). There's also a huge humanoid lion guy, fucking Kevin (still talking about how Shronk's supporting characters represent the fundamental vibrational signatures of the physical universe), my lovely wife, and a really beautiful middle-aged blonde woman.

How's that for a cliffhanger?

"Hey, you still selling tickets for the Golden age Wrestling title?" one of the PVC guys shouts over at us.

Spoilers.

Chapter 12

Stop expecting a normal book. Life isn't packaged into neat little chapters.

Chapter 13: Meeting of the Brain Trust

No, it's not shaking your hand because that's like their version of a TV. It's not a person. Get over here ya goofy bastard. Let's just go through these dudes like a weird clip show. Sit.

Coming in at number one: it's everyone's favorite nightmare fuel—the grey.

The 4-foot-tall grey mechanically turns to look at us, those massive black eyes staring. Little nose and mouth not doing much, but it's definitely got a face. He immediately starts trying to make us think the room is empty. Oh no, you don't, you little shit. I've got you, don't worry, I say, patting you on the back. Don't show fear. Fear is the mind-killer. There I go, plagiarizing again! Tingly.

I've never met these assholes, so I don't really have any cool stories. Sorry. Greys are sort of weird 'cause I heard there's loads of dudes out there you would call 'a grey,' but they aren't all probers. They're just people, remember. Sort of. I'll just leave you with this, and it's probably why they leave me alone:

Just imagine them breakdancing. They look like fucking dreidels.

If they're evil, you now have a sort of subliminal comedic psychic protection against them. They can't sneak up on you in your bedroom in the middle of the night because you'll just burst out laughing. It looks like the fucking Beastie Boys waiting for the stage lights to come on at the end of your bed. Get fucked, ya nefarious B.I.G. Probe someone else, lads. Do some research on emotional intelligence and try again. If they're nice you're already golden and they will likely start dancing.

The grey, visibly upset that I'm just fucking dunking on him, stomps off out the door we came in from. I watch him leave and can't help but feel a pang of something—not quite guilt, but close. It's easy to make jokes, to turn these encounters into punchlines, but sometimes I wonder. If these guys are really as detached as I think, or if somewhere, even in that grey, vacant stare, there's a

flicker of something else. Maybe he's as confused by me as I am by him. But hey, I've got bigger things to worry about.

Now that he's gone, the room feels a little lighter. I feel comfortable enough to point out several people huddled in one of the—well, there's no corners, but they're standing over there. It's the guys in red latex. They're looking around all over the place, studying, learning.

Coming in at number two! It's the latex brigade. These guys are like doctors or scientists or something. It's hilarious. We first met in a series of dreams I had been having. Bizarre ethical dilemmas, like, "Will you save this octopus or will you fuck this babe?" I kicked that lady in the face. Believe. I love octopood.

Anyway, we finally met after a particularly eventful dream test. Very briefly, they had me tied down in a cage in the back of a pickup truck. This thing is bouncing around, smashing through gardens and shit in some neighborhood. The maniac driving runs over a group of school kids who are just standing there. School kid everywhere. I'm laughing the entire time.

Over the course of months of these dreams, I had realized what was going on. I knew it was all bullshit somehow, and I was a little tired of getting fucked about by these wankers. The guy driving starts giving me shit for reacting counter to expected parameters.

The dream shifts and I'm lying in a hospital bed, as dreams do. Not scared. Not feeling anything, really. There's three extremely handsome blonde doctors standing shoulder to shoulder at the end of my bed. Who do these fucking Fabios think they're playing?

I just straight-up said to them, "Are you guys aliens? Because this whole thing has just been fucking weird." The doctors looked at me like I had just grown a second head.

After I assured them that I wouldn't freak out, the Fabios decided to reveal themselves. Three bald guys in red latex bodysuits shimmered into existence in front of me. Pretty much just bald humans with no ears, pale, almost clammy skin, their noses were sort of like a flesh bridge across their face. You know it's

real because I wouldn't make up such shitty aliens. I'd have given them 19 eyes and an arm that shoots lasers.

The BDSM guys reluctantly told me basically what I had already known. They were like doctors, just running some tests on me. Nerds, basically. I didn't really mind, I'm a nature enthusiast myself. Plus, the dreams were entertaining and educational. What did it all mean? Who cares.

One of the PVC guys spots a bug or something on the floor. Great, now they're all down there. Shuffling around. Poking it. One of them is trying to ask the bug how it perceives reality. Alright, these guys won't be saying anything for a while. What if the bug was me from the vision thing I had? Remember that? I literally just remembered that it was even in the book. You should have reminded me.

We walk over to a dude who looks suspiciously like the Narrator. He's wearing some sort of floral open robe thing and a pair of Converse All-Stars. Hair's on point too. He stops floating in a lotus position and stands patiently, waiting for me to finish describing him. His hands are clasped in front of him. Or her. Yeah, fuck it, keep it ambiguous. Hardly any women in this fucking book. The sentient walnut was a woman, but it feels like a stretch, you know?

Coming in at number three, it's Buddha! You're shaking your head like Buddha isn't an alien. It's my fucking book, alright. I think I might be one of the incarnations of this Buddha here.

When I slipped and fell into the cosmic river, I unfortunately resigned one of my future selves to Buddhahood. Whoops! This is the dude who will come out of that river one day. Sure, why not, you think. Fuck it. It's his mental breakdown. He can do what he wants.

That's a real thing, you can look it up. Anyway, I just have a feeling. I know that's pretty wacky, but I don't care what you think and I never have. Buddha is cool. That might sound like a lot of responsibility, but no one ever believes Jesus on the subway when he tells people, so it will probably be fine. That's why he drinks so much. Back in the pub, Jesus grunts in his sleep, practically buried under Bud Light bottles.

Buddha has places to be, so they calmly spit some wisdom:

"You seek enlightenment like it's some kind of trophy, a book, or some mountaintop to stand on and yell, 'Look at me!' But here's the thing—you were never supposed to reach the top. The climb? That's it. The climb is all there is. Every step, every misstep, every time you curse at the rocks for tripping you—that's the point. Enlightenment isn't an achievement, my friend. It's realizing you were never separate from the path to begin with. Oh, and while you're at it, stop trying to avoid the mud. You're meant to get dirty."

They pause, chuckling slightly at the PVC guys still crawling around on the floor.

"You're like a kid trying to mop up the ocean with a sponge. It's adorable. But sooner or later, you'll realize the ocean doesn't need cleaning. Neither do you."

They wave at us and you suddenly know Sanskrit.

They sit down on one of the recessed sofas and start meditating. Well, it looks like meditation to you. But it's me, so they're probably watching *Star Trek* on the inside of their eyelids or something.

Neat.

I stare at Buddha, or myself—whatever they are—trying to grasp the weight of those words. Enlightenment isn't some shiny thing at the top of a mountain? The journey is all there is? The climb? I already knew all that shit. It sounds right, almost annoyingly so. A part of me wants to reject it, to laugh it off as cosmic nonsense. But deep down, I know it's true. The times I've felt most at peace weren't when I reached some big milestone—they were in the chaos, the struggle, the mess of it all. Peace despite all that. Because of all that. Maybe this path, as winding and bizarre as it is, is exactly where I'm supposed to be.

Coming in at number four, it's the cloud! You remember the cloud? That's why your skin is so itchy. She does what might be a cha-cha, that just removes one of the dudes we were going to talk about from existence. Shame, he was cool.

The cloud begins speaking into your mind. You feel the words and receive strong impressions as it unleashes a barrage of awe-inspiring lore into us:

“From your perspective, I am the force that sustains your reality. Everything you see, touch, feel, or dream about—it all flows through me, because I am the foundation upon which your existence is built. The stars in the sky, the thoughts in your head, the ground beneath your feet—I created it all from myself. Not as an act of will, but because I simply am. Everything you know, everything you’ll ever know, comes from me, just as one day, it will come from you.”

The cloud has a moment of serene reflection—you feel peace.

"I do not experience time as you do. I do not exist in the same linear sequence of moments, but rather in every moment simultaneously. In a sense, I have always been here, and so have you. You think of me as separate, as something ‘out there,’ some distant God or power. But the truth is simpler and more beautiful than you realize: I am you. And you are me.”

The room is filled with a feeling of indescribably deep love. Everything is sharper. Richer. More real. You know it was telling the truth. We look at each other. We can see every pore on each other’s face. Your pores look great! I laugh. You laugh.

The cloud turns into a pillar of molten metal that stretches all the way up and down the three dimensions you can see. It turns perpendicular and vanishes.

That feeling of love—deep, unconditional, and infinite—lingers long after the cloud has disappeared. For a while, everything feels sharper, clearer. The haze of uncertainty, the existential dread that hangs in the background of everything, fades. We laugh again. Is this what it means to see things as they are? To feel connected to everything, to know that, somehow, you're part of something bigger? That everything is actually okay? You don’t know if you believe it, but right now, in this room full of bizarre beings, we feel... something. Maybe it’s love. Maybe it’s peace. Maybe it’s just the residual effect of being in the presence of a fucking mustard gas deity. Whatever it is, it feels good.

Alright, thanks, cloud. I say, rubbing my eyes. Fuck me. Whole room's crying now. Are you crying? It's okay to cry. We do a group hug. Everyone. I'm not describing them all again. That was intense.

Now that the cloud is gone and your eyes have dried a bit, you can actually get a better look at the next paragraph. There's a short dark-haired lady waving at us. She's eating a pot of instant ramen. Oh, she's dropped it.

Coming in at number five, it's my wife! How's it going, babe? You good?

"Yeah, pretty good," she says. "Why am I inside a book? We're watching *tv*. Also, why is my skin itching?"

"I wanted to spend a bit more time with you," the Narrator explains. "You're very clearly an alien or some sort of Hindu demon reincarnation. So it works out well. Thematically appropriate, yeah?" She's looking at *you* as if to say, "Why are you encouraging this?"

Tell her to get fucked, we're on a night out. Any stories or anything you want to share while you're here, babe? Anything spooky? For the book?

"Babe, did you wash your face? Babe, didn't I ask if you could wash yourself? Look at this picture of a duck."

Even here, in the middle of this surreal brain trust, my wife manages to bring me back down to earth. It's funny how love works like that—no matter how far you float into the bizarre, there's always someone or something that keeps you tethered. I never expected her to be part of this story, and yet, here she is, keeping me sane. Can you fucking imagine me without her? Scary.

Maybe that's the real lesson in all this: no matter how cosmic or alien things get, the connections we make—the real ones—are what matter. Even if they're confused by everything happening around them. And honestly, she's right. I probably didn't wash my face. You can clearly see that I don't, but you don't say anything. Cos you're a good friend.

Coming in at number six, it's Kevin.

The fucking hair. He's got a Cheeto stain or something on his jumpsuit, but otherwise, he's the same. He was looking out the window that you only just noticed. Full-on, half-the-room, ceiling-to-floor glass. You're fucking blind, dude. I dunno, it's like a completely different view from the planet we were on. Fuck me, it's just a jungle made of flesh—you'll get used to it.

Instead of turning around, Kevin just makes his face be on the other side of his head. You can see his eyes slyly looking around the room for somewhere to play his *Shronk* DVD. Well, it's not a DVD, it's like some sort of fucking crystal hieroglyphic embedded under his skin, but it's easier to just say DVD. Right? How the fuck did he even know about this? Oh, right. Ok, I'm just going to go for it. You brace yourself as if Kevin is going to explode.

"Kevin, what are you?" I say, inquisitively. It's a simple question. Let's see how he handles it.

Kevin has been standing with his eyes closed for some time. He's preparing for something. His eyes flash open, they're glowing, like the lava from the *Temple of Doom*. They looked just like that. And he speaks:

"So, you want to know what I am? That's cute. You see, the thing is, I'm you," he says, pointing at me. "But not like 'you' you. I'm future you, past you, and everything-in-between you, all rolled up into a sparkly, interdimensional burrito. I've already been where you're headed, and I've walked every version of the path you're stumbling through right now. But here's the kicker—I'm still figuring it out, too."

He pauses for a moment, his eyes becoming unfocused as he looks through us at something unseen. We're glancing at each other. We can't believe what we're hearing. Not the interdimensional shit, that's boring, he hasn't mentioned you know who.

"I'm a higher version of you, sure. Call me ascended, call me enlightened, call me late for dinner—I don't care. I exist outside your limited idea of time, which means I see things in a way you can't even begin to wrap your squishy human brain around yet. But that doesn't make me better than you, just...further along."

I motion for Kev to continue. Doing great! Kevin's starting to sway from side to side a little as he talks. He's really flying now.

"Think of it like this: I'm the you who made it past the existential crisis, the cosmic breakdowns, and the awkward phase where you think you understand the universe but still can't parallel park. I've gone through all that, come out the other side, and now I'm chilling in some kind of higher-dimensional hammock. But don't get too excited—I'm not the 'final form.' There's no such thing. Even I'm still climbing, evolving, expanding, whatever you want to call it. You'll get here one day, but don't expect it to be some big finish line."

"So yeah, I'm you, but I'm also not. I'm everything you could be, everything you will be, and everything you've ever been. Call me a cosmic guide, call me your future self, or just call me Kevin. Doesn't really matter. What matters is, I'm here to remind you that this isn't a journey with an end. It's a spiral, and every time you think you've figured it out, guess what? Another turn. Just like how every fairy tale has layers—like an onion, right? Always peeling back."

Kevin blacks out.

His head clips the edge of an artistic-looking table and sends it fulcruming into the ceiling. The ceiling is alive, so the table just sort of stays wedged up there. The strain of not talking about *Shronk* was too much for him. But he did it. The crazy son of a bitch actually told us who he is. Fuck me. Couldn't have done it without you, bud. Wow. The wig is glued on, by the way—I've checked before.

Kevin's words still swirl in my mind as we gaze at his crumpled form on the floor. The idea that he's me—past, future, everything in between—is too much to fully wrap my head around. But there's something oddly comforting about it. Like, if Kevin's already been through all the shit I'm going through, maybe there's hope on the other side. Maybe the cosmic mess I'm in isn't just chaos for chaos's sake. Or maybe Kevin's just as clueless as I am and we're both stumbling through this weirdness together. Either way, it's nice to know I've got a spot on that higher-dimensional hammock waiting for me. I've always fucking loved hammocks.

We turn to talk to the blonde woman. She's standing at the edge of the room, looking as if she just walked into a chess tournament and realized it wasn't worth her effort. I first saw her when I lived in Ecuador. In a bar. Everyone was just ignoring her, a supermodel basically. This was the sort of town where I got attention walking down the street. So this was fucking weird. The kind of person who should draw attention, who should be surrounded by admirers—but here she is, alone in the middle of all this chaos. No one's even noticed her, except me. Clocked it right away. Alien.

Her gaze locks on mine, and there's something more than human in those eyes—something so utterly beyond that I forget for a moment that I ever wanted to bang her. It's like standing in the presence of something that doesn't care about attraction, or attention, or even this room. She's here, but not here for us. Not for me. She looks at us like two of the monkeys have waved at her on her safari.

She smiles, as if she's just remembered something.

"Hey, you still owe me 100 dollars."

But the chapter just sort of ends.

Chapter 14: GOD GAMER

You realize we're back in the bar. Oh no. Oh wait—it's cool. Not *that* bar, but a new one. This place has a vibe. Massive guitars hang from the ceiling like ghosts of rock legends, casting long shadows across an impossibly wide space. There's a jukebox in the corner belting out bagpipe tunes, courtesy of the barman, who hates paying for songs. Solidarity, brother. There's a few ghostly patrons drifting around.

You see me playing pool ten feet away. I'm usually closer, but here? Something's off. You walk over, dodging chairs and getting a feel for the place. It's weirdly spacious. The ceiling's so high, you can barely see where it ends—maybe this was an old firehouse. Who knows? Could've been anything. Ladder factory maybe.

I rack up the balls and toss you a cue. It sails past your hand—right in the face. Classic. *Nice catch, hero.*

"I came here every day for seven months," I say, leaning on the table. Not sure if I'm bragging or lamenting. Either way, it's getting the plot moving.

This place was my haven. A spot where I could lose myself for a while, listen to the chatter, and maybe, just maybe, win a game of pool. Not that I ever did. Honestly, I lost every game. Even when I lined up the perfect shot, the ball jumped the pocket like it had other plans. It's fucking Sisyphus' pool table. Every game is a boulder to push uphill.

But I kept coming back. Day after day. Even with all the shit going on in my life, I kept showing up. Admittedly I was an alcoholic, but you know what? I think I get it now.

Humans are fucking badass.

Look at it like a video game. You're not here to "win"—you're here to level up. Every experience, every bit of suffering or joy, it all gives you Experience Points

for your soul. Just by being alive, you're generating it. But a rock? Nah, not racking up much XP. Too easy.

Here on Earth? This is fucking **Nightmare Mode**. You didn't sign up for the easy stuff. You signed up for the hardest mission there is. And the fact that you're still playing—still pushing that damn boulder—makes you a spiritual juggernaut. Every time you get up and keep going, every time you help someone else, that's you leveling up. That's why this planet is beautiful. It's chaos, but it's rich with possibility. It's an insane madhouse made of more pieces than you can count, or would even know what to do with. But think of the things you **could** build with all those pieces.

Maybe you can't fix everything. But can you make the world just a little bit better? It doesn't have to be huge. It doesn't even have to be every day. Shit, a single moment can be everything. And you don't have to do it alone. But I'll tell you this—it feels fucking good. I'm on team love. Team all is one. Team It's nice to be nice. Sunshine and rainbows and all that shit. You're full of it, punk.

And that's what all this is really about. I think that's what the original Buddha was saying—if he was real at all. (He was.) You go through life, respawn after respawn, and each time you forget the details. But when you pick a direction, when you break free from that cycle, when you stop needing to respawn, that's when you're free. That's when you *level up*. Maybe that's true enlightenment—at least from a human perspective. I don't know for sure, but it feels true in a way.

Here's the kicker: you don't have to rush it. I've jacked off 8 times since I started writing this chapter for example. You don't have to be the first to cross the finish line. You can hang around a bit longer, learn the rules, and try to help the other players. That's what I'm doing. That's what all my other selves are doing. We're just trying to make this game a little more fun, a little more bearable, for **everyone**.

You want a utopia? Love-powered Star Trek utopia? A world where you can skydive off the pillars of creation or conjure a burger out of thin air just because you felt like it? That's the kind of future I'm talking about. A world where the

air is also burger. It's not impossible. Fuck, the boffins will figure it out. But it starts with the little things—being a bit kinder, a bit more present. Figuring your shit out basically. It's all part of leveling up.

But how do you tell a video game character that he's both the character and the guy controlling the character? That he's controlling himself and being controlled at the same time? It's mental, I know. The thing is, you exist in multiple dimensions at once. There's a dozen or more versions of "you" out there, playing different versions of the game, and the kicker? All those 'yous' are working together. Sort of.

Suddenly, the bar doors slam open. Heavy boots clomp across the floor. *Here we go.*

"WHERE'S MY BONGINOMICON, YOU THIEVING BASTARD!?"

You freeze. I sigh. He's not talking to you. Another narrator steps into the light, eyes wild and fixed on me. He's dressed like a purist—dangerously sober, serious, his clothes woven from what looks like organic hemp. His eyes are blazing with self-righteous fury.

"It's always the fucking Bonginomicon," I mutter, chalking my cue. "Never a greeting. Never a 'Hey, how's your wife?' Just 'where's my Bonginomicon?' Like I'd want that piece of shit."

"You know what I'm talking about!" he bellows. "Don't act like you're above this. You think you can just mess with the fabric of reality? You've been stealing *inomicons* from other dimensions, and you know what? You're breaking the goddamn balance."

I lean on my cue, trying to stay cool. What is this bellend talking about? "*Breaking* the balance? This isn't about rules or order. This is about something bigger. I'm not just screwing around. I'm THE Narrator. I'm pushing this whole thing forward. Golden age you little bitch. For everyone."

"By cheating reality?" he sneers. "You think pulling i*nomicons* from other dimensions is pushing things forward? You're breaking the very fabric of—"

Before he can finish, WHAM! Another narrator barrels into the scene, a blur of Hawaiian shirt and aviator sunglasses. He haymakers the purist narrator in the jaw, dropping him like a sack of spuds.

"Time to cancel your gym membership," Hawaiian shirt says, casually dusting off his knuckles. He gives us a wink, grabs the unconscious guy by his pig tails, and drags him out the door. His voice echoes back from the astral plane: "You can't accuse people without astral proof! I'll make sure his next chapter's reflective. Spice Force number one!"

And just like that, they're gone.

I turn back to you, shaking my head. *"That guy. Why's he get a catchphrase? Fuck this."*

You're munching on a bagel. This place never had bagels before, but somehow, you conjured one up. The little things, right?

I lean in, voice softer now. "The thing is, I'm not doing this alone. The other 'me's?' They're chill as fuck. We've all got our own shit to handle in our individual realities, but we're in this together. We share knowledge. We help each other out. We're all working to improve the whole damn multiverse. We're all just players in this big, messy game, trying to make it a little better, a little brighter, every step of the way. I'm in your corner. I'll always be in your corner, bud."

Suddenly, Kevin materializes beside me. You didn't even notice him. You *never* notice him until he's already there, like he's always been lurking just outside your awareness. Try to smell him next time, that's what I do. His eyes glow faintly as he casually inspects a beer mug and tosses it aside.

"You know," Kevin says, eyes distant, "humans are a lot like onions. Layered, complicated, messy, but at their core? They're raw, fierce, and unstoppable. Every time you peel back a layer, you get closer to what they really are: universal badasses with more depth than anyone gives them credit for. And let me tell you, I've met some *serious* heavyweights. But humans? They're something **special**."

Kevin leans closer to you, eyes wide with intensity. "You know who else had layers? Yeah, *you do*."

You stare, dumbfounded, but he doesn't say it. He **doesn't say it**. And that's when you realize—he's growing in his own Kevinny way. The *Shronk* reference is hovering right on the tip of his tongue, like a live wire buzzing under his skin. He wants to say it *so* badly. He *needs* to say it. But he's holding back for some reason. It's taking everything he's got.

With a strained smile, Kevin claps us on the shoulders. "You're doing great, guys. Just... keep peeling those layers."

Then, without another word, Kevin vanishes. Just like that.

I sigh. "Kev seems to be trying to prove something now. But hey, he's right about one thing. You? Me? Us? We're peeling layers off the world and off ourselves, playing the long game. And it's not about how fast we do it. It's about how well we play. Humans get a massive bonus from teamwork by the way. I can't stress that enough."

The moment lingers. You're starting to get it, just a little.

I line up my shot again. This time, the ball sinks. Finally.

The pool table explodes.

It's chaos.

Splinters of wood, felt, and fragments of balls fly in every direction. There was a raccoon in there! You're holding your bagel like a shield as the whole room erupts in slow motion.

And in the middle of it all, I grin. Because this is what it's all about. Chaos, progress, destruction, and growth. It's all part of the same damn game. It's all one.

You brush off the debris, still clutching your bagel. "You think we're done?" I ask, stepping over the shattered remnants of the table. "Not even close."

The room reverses the explosion as I turn to you.

"We're going to keep playing," I say, "because that's *what we do.* We keep pushing forward. No matter how many pool tables explode, no matter how many narrators show up looking for a pointless fight, no matter what some evil cloud tries, we're in this for the long haul. You and me."

And that's when you really start to get it. Just a little.

Not everything is about winning the game—it's about playing it. Playing it *well*. For you, for me, for everyone across the everywhere.

I swagger over to the wall, grab another cue, and hurl it to you. This time, you catch it. Fucking badass.

"Alright, let's play. Punk."

Chapter 15: Punchline? I'm the fucking lizard king bitch

We're in the Infinite Mall Realm—a place where dreams, nightmares, and cosmic absurdity come to shop. It's a mindfuck of a mall—your favorite retail chains crammed between metaphysical nonsense and god-tier weirdness. Somehow unrecognizable, but also exactly like the mall in your town. That's irony for you.

Right between a store selling baseball caps and a gay spa run by cacti is Brahmā Lama Ding Dong, a comedy club.

I glance at you, smirk, and give the flickering neon sign a lazy nod. "I'd have called it Brahmārmageddon. Fucking shithole," I say, sweeping my arm like I'm inviting you into something awesome. You blink, still confused. *Weren't we playing pool?* Yeah. And now we're here. I'm getting sloppy. Note to self—buy a toothbrush. Remove from book before publication.

Inside, the seating is all floaty and weird, and the crowd? It's packed with entities from every fucked-up corner of the multiverse. There's a blob creature in the back munching on nachos. Some kind of dandelion-person puffing out clouds of spores—yeah, you're sneezing. Try not to die. A group of little eggplant-shaped dudes with legs run around like maniacs, and they're definitely not here for the show.

The scene's chaotic, but you know what's worse? Every comic on stage has bombed harder than the planet that made earths asteroid belt.

We've been sitting through this cosmic dumpster fire of a comedy night for almost an hour. One guy tried explaining geopolitics through flat-Earth theory. Another attempted a bit about quadrupeds. Even Pogo—who's splashing around in the ball pit, looking like he's on the verge of going postal—is losing faith in this gig. We watch another failed comic get flushed away down some wormhole. Boo!

I roll my eyes at you and stand up. *"I've never done stand-up."*

I hop on stage, snatch the mic from some sad platypus-looking guy who's trying to roast anime, and plant myself under the spotlight. The void? Yeah, it's staring back. But I'm used to that.

I take a sip from my drink—no, wait—I *chew* it for effect. Tap the mic.

"Alright, let's get something fucking straight. You've been lied to. The joke? There is no joke. Enlightenment? It's like trying to find the punchline when the universe already punched it."

The crowd's starting to stir. Even Pogo's head pops out of the ball pit, intrigued.

"You, sitting there, waiting for some grand revelation, like the universe is about to hand you the keys to the heavenly penthouse? Guess what? You were always enlightened. You just forgot because you're the universe pretending it's not the universe. It's like driving home after work, pulling into the garage, and then sitting there for eight hours because you forgot you were already home. When you finally get out of the car? That's enlightenment."

I pause, smirk. *Still not sure about the smirk thing, but rolling with it. Bit of a bad boy.*

"Anyone here been stared at by the void? You folks ever *seen* the void? You know that saying, 'stare into the void and the void stares back?' Yeah, well, it didn't just stare back at me. It brought its big void brothers and fucking kicked my ass. Then they high-fived each other like, 'Good job, voids!' That's enlightenment. Realizing the punchline was... you."

A ripple of laughter moves through the crowd. I'm in the zone now.

"And don't even get me started on synchronicity. You know those weird little nudges from the universe? Like, 'Hey, go here, do this, it'll be fun!' And you're standing there thinking, 'Is this a good timeline? Bad timeline? Who the fuck knows?' The joke is, it's all just setups for a punchline that never existed. The universe thought you thought it'd be fun to stumble around like a cosmic drunk for a few lifetimes. From a certain angle, it *is* fun, you know?"

The laughter's building now. We got some ascended masters in the back cracking up. Blobs are shifting colors, dandelions puffing out laugh clouds. A living rock garden in the corner is clacking in amusement.

"Look, the universe isn't just screwing with you for kicks. It's handing you lessons—setups. Tough ones, sure, but setups all the same. Like, 'Let's see how many banana peels you can slip on before you figure out the joke.' And when you do? Surprise! The punchline is... there *was* no punchline. You're the banana peel bitch."

I chew my drink again, savoring the moment. The crowd's hooked.

"And you know what makes it worth it? The powers, baby. Yeah, the siddhis. You start unlocking all this wild magic shit. Levitating, reading minds, seeing through walls... but Marvel already used most of them for their fucking movies! You think enlightenment's just some floaty, mystical state? Nah, it's *God Mode*, with a bag of tricks. You fly around, surf timelines, and read the Christmas presents under the tree with your mind—but you still can't remember your phone number. Power, baby."

Suddenly, a heckle from the back cuts through the laughter: "Talk about *Shronk*!"

I pause, smirk (this time for real), and look straight at Kevin, sitting there smug in his *Shronk Forever* T-shirt. I point at him.

"*Shronk*? Yeah, sure thing, Mo. Enlightenment is like *Shronk*—going on a wild adventure to discover the secret of life, find the princess, only to realize you had a thick, sexy ogre wife waiting for you the whole time. She's got curves, you've got layers, and enlightenment? It's like an onion—it makes you cry, makes you laugh, and then you realize you've been peeling yourself this whole time. *Shronk* is deep as fuck bitch."

The room *loses it*. Even Pogo's hurling plastic balls at the stage, trumpeting in between splashes.

I look straight at you, grinning.

"I laugh as much as I can because honestly? It's all you can do. And it feels good. The universe? It's you. It's me. It's Pogo. It's Kevin in his *Shronk* shirt. We're all the same thing, laughing at the same cosmic joke. Together. Separate. One big, chaotic family."

The room's rolling now, a wave of laughter echoing off the weird floaty walls. The dandelions are puffing up so much, someone might suffocate, but at least they'll die laughing. Even the cloud-being in the back emits whisps of what I assume is happy smoke.

"And here's the kicker: The universe isn't here to make you miserable. It's here to teach you. Sure, it might feel like you're punching yourself in the balls sometimes, but guess what? You set this up! You wanted to stumble around, fall into rabbit holes, slip on a few banana peels. Why? Because that's where the best lessons are. And honestly? The best drugs are down there, too. Probably."

I let the moment hang, watching the crowd lose it. Blobs, dandelions, and eggplant dudes alike are cracking up.

"And that's the secret, folks. Enlightenment isn't about climbing some mystical mountain and standing at the peak. It's about realizing you were always at the top—and that you've been sitting there, sipping your drink, waiting for someone to point out the view. The universe? It's you, laughing at yourself, playing a game where the football has to get into the pit stop before you find the golden snitch to unlock the monastery kitchen to find the football. The only way to win? Stop worrying about the rules and enjoy the ride."

The room *explodes* in applause. And I mean literal explosions, because apparently, someone in the crowd with pyrokinesis got a little too excited. Even the cloud-being in the back is spewing out multicolored vapor of satisfaction.

As I step off the stage, I catch Kevin leaning against the wall, that smug grin still plastered on his face. He gives me a thumbs-up.

I nod back, grinning. "Yeah, I know. My crowd works way better. Enlightenment's like an onion. Makes you cry, makes you laugh, and makes

you realize you've been peeling yourself the whole damn time.Humour makes onions delicious."

That's the cosmic joke. You're already enlightened. So laugh, because really, what else are you going to do?

Chapter 16: Wheel of Karma: Spin to Win, Enlighten to Break

Welcome to the afterlife's worst-kept secret—the **Wheel of Karma**. Fresh souls from Earth Realm, still dizzy from whatever nonsense just killed them, are lined up, waiting for their next assignment. It's the cosmic game show nobody signed up for but everyone's playing. You can see it in their eyes—hope, fear, confusion. The kind of blank stares you only see in public transport or tax offices.

The stage is massive, lit up like some sickly Vegas nightmare. In the center? The **Wheel of Karma**—a hulking monstrosity made of stone and alien bullshit. It's supposed to read your karma and spit out your fate for the next life. Standing next to it is a big set of scales: **Service to Others** on one side and **Service to Self** on the other. Simple, right? But trust me, this whole thing is rigged.

You're staring at the setup like it's starting to make sense. You idiot. *It's not supposed to make sense.*

"Alright, let me break it down for you," I say, pointing to the scales. "The idea is, if you get more **Service to Self**, you get *more* service to self in your next life—more greed, more loneliness, more 'me me me' vibes. But if you get **Service to Others**? You end up with more of that—kindness, connection, all the feel-good shit. It's like a cosmic feedback loop, right? You spin the wheel, it gives you more of what you already are. It's almost poetic, except it's also bullshit."

Contestants stand nervously in the glowing circle, spinning the wheel like it's gonna save them. But the wheel? It's reading their karma like a sleazy car salesman. The prizes? *No friends*, *Lifetime of Paper Cuts*, *Always Stubs Toe on Furniture*—you know, the real existential horror.

And hosting this cosmic mess? Kevin. Kevin's wearing a suit that's part game show host, part homeless wizard. He's got a mic in one hand and a clipboard

in the other, but let's be real: it's mostly for show. The back of his clipboard has "Shronk Rules" carved into it. His bowl cut is gelled into something resembling a quiff. He looks like he just stumbled out of a parallel universe where hair gel is currency.

Kevin's job is to pretend like this whole thing matters. But deep down? He's waiting for someone to break the system.

"Next contestant!" Kevin yells, pointing at some poor teenage girl who just died. She steps into the glowing circle, eyes darting around like someone's about to sell her kidneys on the black market.

The screen behind her blares to life. **Service to Others: 30%. Service to Self: 70%.** Ouch. Not great, kid.

She spins the wheel. The thing groans like it hasn't been greased since the dawn of time. It clicks around, slower, slower, aaaand... **Never Gets a Girlfriend. Ever.**

She slumps. Kevin hands her a card that reads, *Sorry, bro. Try again in 80 years.*

A trapdoor opens under her feet, and down she goes, sucked into the void like a bad dinner decision.

"Better luck next life!" Kevin shouts after her, trying (and failing) not to laugh. His *Shronk* T-shirt peeks out from under his blazer.

Next up, some dude with a pretty decent karma readout. **Service to Others: 60%, Service to Self: 40%.** He spins the wheel... *Moderately Successful YouTube Channel*.

Not bad, but not great. Trapdoor opens—down he goes. Sucked right back to Earth to work on his editing skills or some shit.

Kevin's grinning. "Alright folks, who's next to spin this *bad boy*?"

We've been standing here watching this disaster like a couple of tourists at a freak show. You seem entertained. Fair enough. I roll up the sleeves of my bathrobe and crack my neck. "Alright, kid. Watch how it's done."

I swagger up to the platform. The second my foot hits the glowing circle, the whole system glitches. Sparks fly, screens flicker, and alarms start going off. The souls watching scatter like they've just seen the apocalypse. You put on your sunglasses.

The scale? It doesn't know what the fuck to do with me. **Service to Others** shoots past the max, the needle spinning out of control, while **Service to Self** barely registers. The scale starts smoking.

Kevin's watching. He knows what's coming. His grin is wide enough to break his face, but there's something else—he's fucking excited. Like he's been waiting for this moment.

"Alright, big guy," Kevin says, trying to sound casual. "Spin the wheel. Let's see what happens when you try to out-ogre the universe."

I grab the wheel. It feels heavy as fuck, like I'm about to lift Thor's hammer, but I give it a jerk with my good hand. My left hand. My jerking hand.

The wheel spins. At first, it's slow, but then it gets faster and faster. It kicks into overdrive. The enormous mass of rock turns into a monolithic *frisbee* in my hand, spewing wiring and bits of archaic stone all over the room. It's spinning so fast it just begins to evaporate. The wheel can't hold its form under the *absolute pressure* of my presence.

Confetti rains down. Lights flicker. Alarms blare louder. The giant screen above flashes one word:

ENLIGHTENED.

The crowd goes silent, watching the chaos unfold. Kevin lets out an exaggerated sigh, pretending to be disappointed.

"Well, well, well, looks like we've got a game-ogre over here!" He tosses the mic into the air, catches it, and winks at me. "You broke the wheel, dude. No more spins for you."

The souls in the audience start murmuring. Some are glowing faintly, starting to catch on to the cosmic joke.

I turn to the crowd. “Yeah, that’s right. The game? It was never real. The wheel, the prizes, the scale? Just distractions to keep you spinning in circles. But once you wake up? You’re out. The real fun starts when you realize you were never really playing at all.”

One by one, the souls start glowing brighter, their realization spreading like wildfire. One guy, who’s been cursed with *No Friends* karma for a dozen lifetimes, starts floating, laughing like a fucking maniac as his chains fall away.

Kevin shakes his head, pretending to be annoyed. “Oh great, now we’ve got a room full of enlightened beings. What’s next? A *Shronk* reboot with *actual character development*?”

The souls are waking up, one by one. Some float off, some just stand there grinning like idiots, radiating light. I look back at you. "You see? It’s rigged from the start. You were never meant to spin the wheel forever. You break the game by waking up. And once you do? The real fun begins."

Kevin’s still pretending to be pissed, but he’s loving this. “Well done, man. You’ve officially broken the Wheel of Karma. You’re a cosmic killjoy. What’s next?”

I grin. “Next? We show everyone else how to break it, too.”

Suddenly, something catches my eye. At the back of the crowd, one sly bastard steps onto the platform, sneaking onto the scale. The screen flashes **100% Service to Self** before shorting out completely. The dude vanishes into the void, laughing his ass off. Enlightenment doesn’t always come from a place of helping others.

I look at you. “Did you see that guy?”

You shake your head, struggling to take off your jacket. Figures.

"As above, so below," I say, watching the souls light up like a fucking cosmic rave. "And if that's true, then somewhere out there, the mysteries of life are probably just a bunch of office drones stamping karma files and hoping nobody notices how rigged the whole system is."

Kevin snorts. "Cosmic bean counters?"

I nod. "Cosmic bean counters. And guess what? Once you wake up, you don't have to wait in line anymore."

The crowd is glowing, full-on *jellyfish rave mode*, and it's beautiful. They're floating, laughing, some just chilling and enjoying the moment as the cosmic truth hits them like a brick made of enlightenment.

"And that's the kicker," I say. "Once you realize the game's rigged? You're done with it. Enlightenment isn't about winning or losing. It's about breaking the system. You don't need to spin the wheel anymore. Not on Earth anyway. You're too big for it. Linear existence? That's baby shit. Once you're done playing, the real fun starts. Then you can chill with me and the other cosmic teenagers."

Kevin claps, slow and sarcastic. "What's next, a *Siddhi reality show*?"

I laugh, poking Kevin in the leg. He wobbles like jelly under my touch. "Sounds fucking hilarious. But first we'll just have to show the rest of them how to break the game."

We stand there, watching the glowing souls float away, off to whatever cosmic playground awaits them. One by one, they fade into the infinite, leaving us standing there, grinning like idiots.

I do my best Sylvester Stalone impression.

"C'mon, kid. Time for the next round."

We turn and walk away, leaving the Wheel behind, ready for whatever comes next.

Chapter 17: Pirate Ship Love: Surf the Kali Yuga

I *was made for loving you* starts blasting from speakers hung under the topsail as we careen over enormous waves.

I spit saltwater in your face for dramatic effect. You love it, you slag. Welcome to Pirate Ship Earth, the janky, maltreated ship somehow floating through the universe like it hasn't already taken 500 cannonballs to the side. The sails? Bedsheets. The crew? A bunch of misfit lunatics—some tangled in the rigging, others beating the shit out of each other with oars, but all of us? We're in this mess together. And love? That's what's holding the whole goddamn thing afloat.

I'm standing with a sandal on the railing, naturally,eye patch over my shades, because I'm the Captain of this shitshow. Pogo, our majestic helmselephant, is steering, trunk wrapped around the wheel. First mate? That's you, nice beard. Don't fuck it up. Keep these idiots in line number one. Don't spare them the whip.

"GET SOME MORE LOVE ON THOSE FUCKING HOLES, YA SALTY BASTARDS!" I scream at the crew, as they slosh around the deck below us. They're panicking because we're taking on water like it's trying to drown us on purpose. The waves are slamming the deck like they're in a glasgow bar brawl, and I'm yelling, but we know what keeps this heap of shit from sinking—love. Pure, uncut, unconditional fucking love.

Pogo's trunk whips the wheel around, nearly tearing the whole boat apart, but he's handling it. The dude is a goddamn pro. *Where did we even get him?* Oh right, a casino heist gone wrong.

Suddenly, the sky darkens. Oh shit. "HERE SHE COMES BOYS!" I scream directly into your face.

My ex-wife. The great storm. She's a massive scaley water beast, easily godzilla tier, crashing through the waves like a battering ram made of materialism and IQ points. Black clouds fill the sky with lightning and requests to take out the garbage. The waves toss the ship around like we're a rubber ducky going over Niagara falls.

She's not here to destroy me though—no, that's not how this works. She's here to push me, force me into a course I don't want, but *need*. That's the thing about love, real love—it isn't always easy, but it's always there to teach you something, whether you want it or not. She helped push me to rock bottom, but that's where I figured it out. I had to break to rebuild. When you have nothing you can be anything. I just had to get knocked off course to find the *right* course. Substitute my ex wife for whatever it is that blows you around.

I wipe saltwater from our faces and shout, "HOLD FAST, YA LOVEABLE GOOMBAS! THIS AIN'T GONNA BE PRETTY!" I'm clutching the railing, knuckles white, but I've got a grin plastered across my face. You? You're looking a bit more skeptical, but you're here for the ride, and that's what matters. Ride or die bitch. Like two enlightened pirate Vin Diesel's powered by love.

The beast reaches us, gliding silently beneath the boat at the last moment. The storm hits seconds behind. The ship lurches as we hit a wave the size of a mountain, tipping damn near vertical. "MORE LOVE! PATCH THOSE HOLES, YA FILTHY KNAVES!" I scream, knowing full well the love is what keeps this ship from splitting in two. Patch it with love, or die trying.

Pogo's going wild at the wheel. He's steering like a fucking formula one driver, but he's got it. His foot shoots out, catching some asshole before he goes flying into the abyss. He lets out a triumphant trumpet, and I yell over the chaos, "FUCK YEAH, POGO!" The crew's scrambling, waves crashing, ropes snapping—but we're all laughing. Still slipping around the deck. Love keeps us going, even in the storm.

I point at one of the crew, some waterlogged young lady from Wisconsin working behind the bar. She nods and throws us two mugs of beer directly into

our outstretched hands. We cheers and start chugging as the crew cheers us on. You follow my lead and hurl the empty mug into the maelstrom.

The ex-wife storms on, thrashing around the boat, but she's not destroying us. She's pushing us. "LOOK AT HER!" I shout standing on the railing, my voice carrying over the roar of the storm. "SHE'S NOT HERE TO SINK US BOYS, SHE'S SENDING US WHERE WE NEED TO GO!" And that's the truth. Sometimes love breaks you. It fucking annihilates you. But it's not here to kill you—it's here to make sure you end up where you're supposed to be. Her storm? It didn't ruin me. It taught me the lessons I needed to learn. It pushed me toward where I needed to be. *You get it now?*

In a narratively unnecessary but hilariously serendipitous turn of events, you feel the deck lurch beneath us. The ship tilts violently again as an enormous amount of water is displaced right beside us. A gigantic figure begins to emerge from the waves. "IT'S MY WIFE BOYS!" I scream as the crew goes fucking mental.

You stare up in disbelief as a truly huge six armed blue skinned version of The Narrator's wife towers above the inexplicably still upright ship. Three of her arms give us a thumbs up like three buildings waving around. "WHAT A FUCKING CUTIE PIE!" I scream. You just scream. The crew cheers in what might be agreement but could easily be existential terror.

Wifes waist is hidden beneath the water but she must be walking because she zooms straight towards the ex, who's still thrashing waves in every direction. Two of the arms dart out and grab the beast with a noise like two whales being slapped into each other. The other four start pummeling in an unsettlingly cathartic flurry of blows.

As quickly as it started the exchange is over. Wife throws the unconscious sea worm off into the depths. She looks down at us, as we look up at her and cling on for dear life. She farts once, an indescribable sound at those decibel levels, then disappears back into the ocean. Like dropping the statue of liberty.

Just when it feels like the ship might finally rip itself apart, we crest a wave and the storm dies down. She's gone. The waves settle, and *Pirate Ship Earth* is still

floating. Barely, but we're afloat. We're soaked, the crew's battered, but we're still laughing. Love got us through that shit. Love gets us through everything.

I laugh, letting water pour out from under my sunglasses. "See? She didn't sink us. She steered us right where we needed to go."

I flip a massive lever by the wheel, and the ship jolts. Half the crew's drunk so they all fall over. The air shimmers for a second, and suddenly—bing—you see it. Ships. Thousands of them, flying through invisible realms, just like ours. They're made of love, too, patched together by the same force driving our bargain boat. Some are glowing, some are sparkling, and some are just as fucked up as ours. But they're all there, sailing through the void with us.

Some of the crew fire at one of them—cannons booming—but it's all a fucking game. The cannonballs explode into confetti and high fives, and we hear laughter echoing from the other ships. The ships regenerate, patched up by love, and we all keep going, sailing through the universe like a bunch of cosmic pirates playing the greatest show of all time.

I look over at you, my first mate. You're standing tall, proud. Your beard looks amazing. "This ship? This crew? It's all just love, man. You, me, Pogo, these idiots fighting over a PlayStation—love is what holds this whole thing together. And yeah, it's messy. It's chaotic. But it's the most powerful thing in the universe."

We're moving faster now, flying over massive waves, the ship cutting through the water like it's powered by something divine. We've got the storm behind us, and up ahead? We see it.

The golden age on the Horizon. Interconnectedness. Everything we could be. Infinite possibilities. Love instead of Fear. Enlightenment. A metaphor for a really great time to be a person on Earth.

You spot it first, glinting in the distance. It's calling to us, glowing with a warm, golden light. You point, and I squint, pretending like I saw it first. "That's global enlightenment," I say, grinning. "The Golden Age. That's what we're sailing toward."

A lot of the crew's working together now, pulling ropes, laughing, *still beating the shit out of each other*, but we're moving faster than ever. Getting there. This ship's a piece of shit, sure, but it's powerful. It's unstoppable when we're all in it together. Love is the wind in our sails bitch, and it's pushing us toward that golden light. Imagine if we actually had 2 of the 3 sails out.

I look at you, leaning on the railing, the wind in my face. "Whatever that shiny thing is, we're heading straight for it. But it doesn't even matter if we get there to be honest. What matters is we're in this together, on this crazy ship, loving every second of the ride."

Pogo's steering us like a goddamn legend, dancing over the waves, the crew's still laughing, still fighting, and we're sailing full speed toward the horizon. Whatever's waiting for us? We'll find out together. But right now, we're in it, riding these waves, powered by love. *That's all we need.*

"ONWARD, YOU GLORIOUS FUCKING BASTARDS! ONWARD TOWARD THE GOLDEN AGE!" I shout, throwing my arms up as the ship crests a massive wave. We're flying now, charging toward whatever the fuck's waiting out there.

And with that, Pirate Ship Earth sails on, once again patched up with love, crashing through the etheric waves toward the next great adventure beyond the horizon.

Chapter 18: The Pain of Existence: Welcome to well known furniture store Hell

We're walking through a higher spiritual density in a well known furniture store—a true nightmare dimension where flat-packed suffering is the only thing on the menu. I love it here. Everything's stacked high on shelves that seem to go on forever. Not a bed in sight, just boxes of emotional trauma, nonsensical assembly instructions, and Allen wrenches made of pure existential dread. Welcome to life, motherfucker.

I grab a box labeled **PHYSICAL PAIN: IMPOTANT RAGE EDITION** off the shelf and toss it into your arms. "Here. Ever walked into a lamppost or something? Yeah, that's the universe reminding you it's still in charge. Enjoy."

You grunt under the weight of the box, struggling to hold it together. "Pain. It's a universal constant. Like the well known furniture store screws that never fit properly—no matter what you do, you're gonna end up hurting yourself."

We keep walking, and I point to a box labeled **MODEL #5: BACK PAIN AT 30 FOR NO DISCERNABLE REASON**. I laugh. "Yeah, I've had that one. Woke up one day and suddenly my spine was auditioning for fucking Cirque du Soleil. Turns out, you don't need to be spiritually awakened to get your ass kicked by a random nerve in your back."

But here's the thing—physical pain? It truly sucks, but that's just the warm-up act. I find the real fun begins when we dive into emotional pain.

We stop at an aisle marked **EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE, DO-IT-YOURSELF SECTION**. The shelves here are packed with every kind of trauma imaginable. Boxes labeled **FAILED MARRIAGE**, **BROKEN FRIENDSHIPS**, and **SOMEONE REPEATED A JOKE YOU JUST SAID AND EVERYONE LAUGHED WHEN THAT GUY SAID IT** are stacked higher than I can reach. I grab a smallish box off the shelf, and it's heavy.

Heavier than you'd think. I couldn't have lifted this box just two years ago. I almost died under the weight of this little thing.

"See this?" I say, rattling the box of **FAILED MARRIAGE**. "This shit is brutal. You spend years thinking you've got it all figured out. You're building something that lasts a lifetime—a life, a relationship—and then *bam*, sixteen wrong moves later and the whole thing collapses like a well known furniture store bookcase with no wall anchors. And there I am trapped beneath it. It fucking hurt dude. And I could lie under that bookcase for as long as I wanted reading about how to get out from under bookcases. But at the end of the day, I just had to sort of shimmy and crawl and huff and puff until I could sort of un wedge myself."

I set the box down and kick it down the aisle. "Hee-YAH! But here's the punchline—you need this pain. Every time you hurt, every time the universe gives you a wedgie, you're building something. Trees don't grow strong with no wind. Strength, wisdom, calluses. It's like the universe is constantly testing you, seeing how many times you can smash your thumb with a hammer before you finally get the damn shelf built. Before you grow."

I gesture to a nearby display labeled **BUILDING YOUR SOUL: SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**. It's a mess. Half-built versions of me are scattered everywhere—arms sticking out at weird angles, legs missing, heads detached. Some of them are just piles of parts that I never got around to assembling.

"Look at this mess," I say, laughing. "These are all the versions of me that didn't make it. There's fucking tons of them. I gesture to the closest one, smashing its head on the floor. The me that thought life was supposed to be smooth sailing, that I'd be handed all the answers. But life? Life is like trying to build well known furniture store furniture without the instructions. The screws are too small, the pieces don't fit, and you end up wanting to throw the whole thing out the window. Or like that guy."

I point to one particularly mangled version of me—**MODEL #28: EXISTENTIAL CRISIS EDITION**. It's half-assembled, its arms flailing in existential confusion. "That was me when I realized that no matter how hard

you try, life is gonna kick you in the balls. Over and over again. You think you're getting somewhere, and then *wham*, cosmic uppercut. What was the point of it all? He'll get over it."

We keep walking through the aisles, passing by more versions of me—some better off than others. There's one labeled **MODEL #30: BROKEN HEART EDITION**. I shake my head at it. "That was a rough one. Felt like I'd been hit by a freight train of emotions, except the train backed up and ran me over a few more times for good measure."

I pause, letting that sink in. Then, I point to the ceiling, which seems to stretch endlessly into the void above us. "Here's the thing—every one of these past selves? They had to die. They had to suffer, so I could keep going. So I could get here. So I could be me. The corpses of the old me make a path that I walk towards the best version of myself. One day I'll be a stone on that path and a new me will be born. It's like the universe is constantly testing you, seeing how many well known furniture store projects you can fuck up before you finally figure out that there's no 'perfect' way to do this. You just do it."

We stop in front of a massive casket display marked **FUNERAL OF PAST SELVES**. The casket is way too big, almost comically so, and it's got **R.I.P. ME** engraved on the front in flashy neon letters. Entities are gathered around, dressed in dark wisps of funeral attire, weeping dramatically. One of them, an interdimensional being with way too many arms and a veil, pats you on the shoulder.

"It's all part of the process," it says in a deep, echoing voice. "Suffering builds strength. You don't float on a cloud by avoiding pain. You rise above it *because* of the pain. Think of it like a cosmic hazing ritual. The universe is just toughening you up."

I nod, solemnly. "Yeah, that's the kicker, isn't it? Every time you hurt, every time you think you can't take it anymore, you're getting stronger. You're building something, even if it feels like you're falling apart."

I flick my hand and the casket swings open. You can see a dead me nestled amongst the pillows. This was my hardest death so far. A good man who could

have lived a long and happily stagnant life. The death of everything I had ever thought I was or would be. It felt almost the same as if I had literally died. He died the instant I was enlightened and I became something truly new. A new chapter of the same book. A continuation of the journey. There's always a new version of us being born, every second. Sometimes the changes are small, and sometimes they are fuck huge. It's up to us to decide how we change.

Suddenly, another cosmic entity—this one shaped like a giant carrot—interrupts. "Think of suffering like trying to install a kitchen from a well known furniture store without all the pieces. It's frustrating, painful, and you'll probably end up throwing some screws across the room. But eventually, you get something put together, and it works. Kind of."

I laugh. "Exactly. Suffering isn't some divine punishment. It's just the way it is. The universe's way of reminding you that life is fucking hard. And sometimes, that's the point. You don't grow from sitting around in comfort. You grow when the universe throws you into the deep end without a life jacket, and you either learn to swim or you drown. Finding comfort amongst all that is the real trick."

We keep moving through the aisles, past the alien casket displays, until we reach the **EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AISLE**. This one's my favorite. I've done almost all of them. It's filled with every kind of spiritual and emotional breakdown you can imagine, each one wrapped in bright packaging like some twisted Christmas present. I pick one up and hand it to you.

"Here. Try this one on for size. **MODEL #20: REALIZING NOTHING MATTERS AND EVERYTHING IS A LIE**. I like to use this from time to time, for old times sake you know?"

You look at it, confused, but I just laugh and toss it back on the shelf. "That's the thing about suffering, my friend. It's necessary. Without it, you'd never get anywhere. Every painful moment is just another step toward building the real you. It also adds a nice contrast to all the good shit. It's not all doom and gloom remember. So yeah, it sucks. But it's also the most important thing in the universe."

We stop in front of a giant sign that reads **LIFE: ALL PARTS INCLUDED, SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**. I stare at it for a second, then turn to you with a grin. "See? It's all in the fine print. You've got everything you need to build yourself—every tool, every piece, every bit of suffering—it's all there. Somewhere. You just gotta figure out how it fits together. And sometimes, you're not gonna get it right. Sometimes, it's gonna hurt. But that's the fucking point. Try to build something you can be proud of bud."

I throw my arm around your shoulder and we start walking toward the exit. "So yeah, suffering sucks. But without it? You'd be stuck with a shitty half-built soul and no Allen wrench to put it together. The universe gives you pain because it knows you can take it. You're stronger than you think, even when you feel like you're falling apart."

As we walk out of the cosmic well known furniture store, I stop one last time and look at you. "Turns out enlightenment isn't about floating on a cloud. It's about building yourself from the ground up, one painful screw at a time. So next time the universe kicks your ass, just remember—you're assembling something truly fucking great. And the missing pieces? They're just the old versions of you that didn't make the cut."

I laugh, pat you on the back, and we walk out into the sunlight and into the next chapter.

Chapter 19: The Sandbox of Enlightenment: Play or Get Played

We land with a plop somewhere on the astral plane. It smells like fucking lemons, and there's purple grass as far as the eye can see, glowing like it's fresh out of Terrence McKenna's garden. Massive astral beasts roam the horizon—a ghost ship floats overhead, and what looks like a dragon made of fire is just chilling with a little shadow monster. They're probably getting stoned together. Monsters, ghosts, and shit that would normally make you crap yourself? Here? They're just part of the vibe.

"Welcome to Level 1," I say, cracking my knuckles. "You thought enlightenment was the finish line? Surprise, motherfucker, it's just where the game starts to get interesting. Honestly, this might be where you get dropped when you die, for all I know."

You're wide-eyed, like you've just stepped into a cosmic video game—which, honestly, you have. This place? It's a giant universal sandbox. Infinite levels, infinite challenges, no real bosses. No winning, no losing.

I point at a little rat munchkin village on a hill, where a big-ass destruction entity is stomping around like it owns the place. "See that asshole? We could fight it... or we could just go give it a nice pat on the back."

You blink at me, processing that while a ratkin gets eaten whole. But I don't hesitate. I march right up to the monster—a towering thing made of pure anxiety—and reach up to give its leg a friendly pat.

"Hey, big guy," I say, patting its scaly limb. "Keep doing what you're doing. You're great at being a cosmic metaphor for mental breakdowns."

The thing lets out a deep rumble, like a badger purring through a foghorn, and then just fucks off into the distance. Meanwhile, the rat munchkin is probably reconsidering life choices.

“That’s the trick, see?” I turn back to you. “The monsters, the challenges? They’re just here to fuck with you until you realize they don’t matter. Pat them on the back, and they’re just scenery. Hell, some of them even suck energy off people in the physical plane. But most humans don’t really use their energy properly anyway, so I’m not even sure how to feel about that. It’s weird, man.”

We keep walking through this infinite playground, and shit keeps shifting—purple grass gives way to floating islands, rivers of neon light, and massive statues carved by some DMT-fueled celestial artist. Power-ups are everywhere: little glowing orbs that say things like "More Peace," "Ultimate Cosmic Chill," and "Faster WiFi." I grab one that says "Extreme Fucking Patience" and make sure you see me as I down it, giving you the side-eye like you’re gonna need it more than me.

Then it hits me, and I slow down. "Look, I won’t lie to you," I say, glancing over at you. "This whole enlightenment thing? It’s kind of a bitter fucking pill sometimes. You spend all this time thinking there’s a final boss or some big endgame, and then you level up and realize it’s just more levels. More monsters, more shit to figure out, more stuff to explore. But it’s not the same, it’s always evolving, always changing.”

“People get so worked up about reaching enlightenment like it’s some prize at the end of a cosmic claw machine. But here’s the kicker—enlightenment? It’s just realizing you’re in the claw machine, and there’s no way out. And now that you know that? You get to ride the damn thing over and over, just like everyone else. Only now, you can laugh at the claw because the joke’s on you, and you’re in on it.”

You’re still picking up power-ups like it's an Easter egg hunt on LSD, but you seem to be listening. “That’s why it’s so important to have each other,” I say louder. “This game? It’s infinite, and yeah technically it’s all just made of you, but it’s better when we’re playing together. Look, I could probably get away with punching someone in the face if I had to, but killing? That’s bad vibes, man. Love thyself, you know? Or maybe it’s all good and all bad at the same time. Who the fuck knows? That’s why we have to do this shit together—help each other out, make sure we’re playing it right.”

We stop in front of this weird-ass structure—like an arcade machine made of solid light, flickering through every color known to man and a few that aren't. I smack a few buttons for shits and giggles, and a portal opens up, swirling like a glowing cosmic toilet flushing itself.

You're staring at it, wondering what's on the other side. I already know the truth.

I drag you through it, and BAM—we're back in the same purple-grassed landscape. Except this time, there are motorbikes. You're looking at me like something's gone wrong. A pop-up appears with a sad little fanfare: *SUPER ENLIGHTENMENT.*

"Woohoo!" I laugh. "Took me 5000 years to get enough points for that one. And guess what? It's the same fucking place we started. Enlightenment's just a door that leads back to where you began. But this time? We've got motorbikes."

There they are—rows and rows of sleek, glowing spiritual crotch rockets lined up like the universe's most badass biker gang just pulled in. Pogo's already on an elephant-sized bike, revving the shit out of it like a fucking cosmic jet engine. Kevin's off in the corner braiding Pogo's tail, but we're ignoring that.

You realize now, don't you? The game never ends because **you** are the game. Everything you've ever fought, every level you've ever faced—it was all you, all along. And now that you're aware, the whole thing opens up like an infinite playground. Enlightenment isn't about finishing the game, it's about realizing you're both the player and the designer.

The air hums with energy as we approach. These aren't just bikes; they're *spiritual fucking Harleys,* humming with the power of the universe. You can feel it. I can feel it. These bad boys are built for speed, freedom and intuition.

"Welcome to enlightenment," I say, slapping your back. "Same shit, new bikes."

I pick out a black one with shimmering gold lines down the frame. Widowmaker. You hop on a pink one with *Live, Laugh, Love* spray-painted on the side. Margaret. We fire them up, and the ground vibrates beneath us.

The bikes roar to life with this cosmic hum, like they're ready for the race of a lifetime.

Fuck learning how to drive. We're off.

Tearing through the astral plane, dodging monsters, grinding rails, and leaving trails of golden light behind us. The world is pure madness—there's no map, no direction, just unfiltered freedom. And it's exhilarating as hell.

But then I see it—a massive chasm up ahead. It's like the gap between what you know and what you *think* you know. Or, you know, ignorance.

"Grab my fucking hand!" I shout, reaching over. You grip it tight, and I can feel our energy linking up. You just feel pins and needles because you don't know shit about energy. We start glowing brighter than a fucking lifted trucks headlights, and our bikes respond, revving harder, faster. We hit the ramp and fly—soaring through the air like we're Evel Knievel with astral jetpacks. And yeah, we make it, easy as fuck.

This bitch ass chasm? It's not just ignorance. It's every fear, every false belief, every time you thought you weren't enough. Together? We soar over that shit. No more falling into the abyss. No more wondering if you're worth the jump. You are. You always were and always will be. And if you don't believe in yourself, someone else will be there to believe for you.

We land on the other side, bikes skidding to a cool as fuck stop, laughing our asses off. No helmets, because this is a book. "That chasm?" I say, breathless. "That's ignorance. And guess what? Together, we fucking jumped it."

Here's the thing though—the ride's not over. Not even close. I look at you, wind whipping through your readerly essence, and I shout over the roar of the bikes. "You thought enlightenment was the final level? Nah, man, it's just Level 1. The real secret? There's no end to this. It just keeps going!"

Trees made of lightning flash in the distance, while rivers of pure thought stream alongside us. Monsters wave at us as we pass, not caring one bit that we're here to rewrite the rules of the game. The clouds in the sky part and warm light streams down on us, thick with pleasant remembrances.

You laugh, and I can see it clicking for you. *This* is enlightenment—the freedom to just be. It's not about reaching some destination. It's about riding. The bumps, the crashes, the fucking chasms. It's all part of the game. Learning as we go. The monsters? They're just scenery now. The chasms? Just shit we jump together while we do kickflips.

And it's easy to think you're supposed to do this alone—that enlightenment is some solo victory lap. But nah, that's just the universe playing a joke on you. This whole thing? It's all about connection, about dragging each other through the walls and jumping those chasms together. I probably could've done this alone... but it wouldn't have been anywhere near as fun. Or maybe I wouldn't have made it at all. Who's to say?

And just when you think we've seen it all, there it is—a massive, glowing door up ahead. Big. Shiny. Important-looking. Like, Chinese emperors door level. It's nice. I slam on the brakes and skid to a stop right in front of it. You pull up next to me, ever the cautious one.

For a moment, we pause. Just let it all sink in. The bikes hum beneath us, the astral winds rustle the purple grass. And there's peace—not the kind you search for, but the kind you stumble into when you stop searching. The world might be chaos, but right now? It's all good.

Kevin ruins it all as he floats around from behind the door. He's on some sort of ten foot tall guy sized hover sun lounger. Try saying that five times fast. Ha! He waves his cocktail at us as he fumbles with his chairs' controls. " Keep peeling those layers guys! Shronk be with you." He says to us as he just sort of uncontrollably levitates up and out of your vision. Fucking hell.

Kevin doesn't seem to care at this point. That didn't even make sense in the context of the chapter. He's just repeating himself. Luckily the reader didn't seem to notice. Or care. They were here for the surprisingly relatable emotional stakes and absurd humor. I hop off my bike and walk over to the door. No messing about.

I push it open, and inside? It's just a fucking doorway. It doesn't go anywhere. Same landscape. Purple grass. Monsters. Motorbikes.

I laugh, shaking my head. "That's enlightenment for you. Just another door that leads back to where you started."

You look at me, trying to process, and I just shrug. "Same place, but you're different now. The game goes on, but now you know. You're free to play it however the fuck you want. I'm chaotic good." I slam the door shut and two of its ancient hinges pop off expensively.

We hop back on our bikes, rev the engines, and I give you a grin. "Let's go fuck around some more. There's no rush. This sandbox? It's worryingly infinite."

And that's it, isn't it? Life, enlightenment—it's just one big loop. You start over and over, each time a little wiser, a little weirder. But now you know—you're not here to finish the ride. You're here to play. Forever. So, hop on, and let's burn some rubber in this infinite sandbox. The next level's waiting.

With that, we tear off again—kicking up purple grass, monsters laughing as we pass, the horizon stretching out endlessly in front of us. There's always another level. Always another jump. Always another fucking ride. Always more friends to make. And that's the point.

Bitch.

Chapter 20: A Q&A with the Universe

We're in the actual void now. Just endless fucking black, like someone spilled ink across everything and forgot to clean it up. Dead center, there's this tiny white dot. I'm reducing the amount of love coming off this bad boy so you aren't uncontrollably drawn back into it before we even finish the book. I explain as I point at it.

"See that? That little dot right there? That's everything. Every. Fucking. Thing. Every universe, every moment, every possibility—it's all in there. And somehow, we're outside of it. How? Fuck if I know. Almost fried my brain trying to figure that one out. This is how I perceived us all. This is how I perceived myself. When I saw the universe, I saw it like this, and I knew I was looking into a mirror."

I snap my fingers, and the dot zooms in. You don't flinch. You're doing better than I did. Now it's enormous, like a glowing, swirling ball of string made of love, dreams, and higher order shenanigans. Infinitely complex, yet somehow perfect. Constantly evolving, but existing all at once. It's everything, but it's also a mess. Kind of like a disco ball—but don't take it too literally.

"This," I say, waving my arms dramatically like a game show host, "is God. Or the universe. Or whatever the fuck you want to call it. It's me, it's you, it's everyone. But it's also one thing. One giant ball of awareness. Everything that ever was and ever will be, all mashed together like some frankenstein's ramen bowl. Weird as fuck, but somehow, exactly how it's supposed to be."

You're staring at it, eyes wide. I get it—I looked the same way when I first saw this. It's a lot to process. But I know you're tripping, so I'm here to make it simpler. Or try.

"And here's the thing," I say, leaning in like I'm about to drop some wisdom, "it's all just consciousness. A massive cloud of awareness. Exactly the same as the one you are. This whole thing? It's like a dream. Infinite drops of god in an infinite

ocean of god. No idea why, no idea how—but that's what it is. It's all awareness, and Earth? Earth's part of the dream. But Earth is this weird little corner of the dream that forgot it's dreaming. Which, honestly, is hilarious if you think about it."

You look confused as shit. I don't blame you.

"Look, I know," I continue. "Earth feels pretty fucking real when you're down there. That's the whole point. It is real. But in the grand scheme? It's just a part of the larger dream. Not bad, not evil, just... weird. And yeah, a lot of the rest of the universe knows what's going on. Earth just kind of got lost in the sauce. It's all some dumb game we sort of get caught up in. Great game though, cos I keep fucking coming back."

I put my hand on the glowing ball, and it ripples under my touch. "Alright, let's ask it some questions."

And just like that, a voice—not really a voice, more like a thought pressed into your brain—starts talking.

"Ah, it's you again. On Earth this time, huh? Here to stir shit up in your own lovingly chaotic way?"

I grin. "Damn right I am. You know I can't stay away baby. Gotta keep things spicy."

"You do. Every time, you bring your blend of order and chaos. Always with good intentions, even if it's a little messy. A master fool."

I look back at you, smirking. "See? Even the universe knows I'm a lovable pain in the ass. Anyway, let's get to it. First question."

"What's the meaning of life? Let's just get that one out of the way."

"Growth, connection, love, fun... and snacks."

"Snacks? Really?"

"Yeah, the little things that make it fun. You're thinking too big. Lighten up."

"Alright, but why the suffering? Why all the pain and bullshit?"

"Pressure makes diamonds. Drama makes growth. Pain's just a tool. Don't take it so personally."

"Easier said than done."

"Exactly. That's the point."

"What happens after we die?"

"You go where you want. Take a breather, go back for another round—it's like a cosmic buffet. Pick your path."

"A buffet? Death's like a Golden Corral?"

"More or less. Some go for dessert first, others come back for the fries. No rush."

"Why don't we remember any of this when we're born? Wouldn't that make it easier?"

"Where's the fun in that? You wouldn't watch a movie if you already knew every twist. Surprises are the whole point."

"I've seen *Shronk* over a hundred times."

"There are exceptions."

"What's the secret to happiness?"

"Balance. Being in the moment. Oh, and naps."

"Naps?"

"Crucial. Recharge. Dream a little."

"Naps, that's where I control airplanes with urine."

"Do we have free will, or is everything already planned out?"

"You get a sandbox. There are some rules, but inside? It's jazz. Improvise."

"So we're free... kind of?"

"More than you think. Less than you hope."

"Is there a final destination? Like, is enlightenment the end?"

"Enlightenment's just another level. It's where the real fun starts, but also, it's the same shit. You're already me. But also, you're still journeying. Both are true."

"So I'm both here and not here?"

"Exactly. Keep going. You're doing fine."

"Okay, so everything is just awareness, right? A big cloud of consciousness?"

"Bingo. Earth just forgot it's dreaming, but the rest of the universe is in on it."

"We're the weird kid at the cosmic sleepover, huh?"

"Yup. But you're figuring it out."

"And I keep showing up, stirring shit up?"

"That's your chosen role. You shake things loose, make shit evolve. Lovingly chaotic. It's your thing."

"Lovingly chaotic. I like that."

"The universe does too. Always has."

I glance back at you. You look like your brain's been through the cosmic blender, so I take a deep breath and explain.

"See? That's what the universe is saying. Earth? The suffering? The weirdness? It's all part of the game. It's all just a game. It's just a dream. And the rest of the universe? They know the deal. They know it's all awareness. Earth just forgot."

I run my hand along the glowing ball again. "But the wild part? Every so often, I think I show up and fuck things up a bit. Lovingly, of course. I stir the pot,

shake things loose. Wake up my friends. And the universe? It fucking loves that."

"Oh yeah. Loves it when you mess around. You bring chaos, but it's the kind that makes things grow. You're doing great."

I smile, glancing at you. "See? Even the universe thinks I'm crushing it. You've got questions, sure. But don't stress. It's all part of the ride. Really, everything is *literally* secretly ok."

The universe hums quietly. "And now?" I ask. "What do you say? Should we ask more dumb questions, or should we go fuck around in the void a bit?"

With a grin, I turn away from the swirling everything, driving my jet ski into the endless darkness with a *woop woop*.

"You've brought great comfort on this journey for him, you know. Thank you. Truly."

You nod, pretending that wasn't the greatest compliment of your life, and spurt your little jet ski after me to splash around in the void for a bit.

Behind us, the universe keeps on humming, still swirling, still dreaming, still everything.

Chapter 21: Multiple mens

I'm halfway through telling you that *Rick and Morty* doesn't have a monopoly on multiple realities when we fade into a mess of... me. And you. Infinite versions of us, doing infinite things across infinite timelines. It's like someone took a cosmic kaleidoscope and shoved us inside. All around, little pockets of space where alternate versions of me—and you—are living out their lives, making different choices, or doing absolutely fuck-all.

Some of the other "me"s are floating, all Zen and enlightened, chilling in meditative bliss above their serene little rock gardens. Others? They're just sitting in offices, clicking through emails that don't matter. One version of me—let's call him "Corporate Me"—is sitting at a desk, doing his taxes for some reason. Most of the other Narrators are laughing at him.

And then there's us—we're in this glowing waiting room, like some cosmic DMV, filled with versions of me all sitting around doing their own dumb shit. Some are trying to hack into the cosmic Wi-Fi (good luck with that), while others are staring off into space like they're waiting for the next season of *Ancient Aliens* to drop.

"Welcome to *Timelines & Realities Inc.*," I say, with a sarcastic wave of the arm. "Where every version of you exists simultaneously, doing whatever the hell they want. You thought there was only one of me? Ha! Idiot. There's a bajillion of me. But, y'know, I'm the best one."

You're already overwhelmed. I get it—this is some real *multiverse mindfuck* territory. I walk up to one version of myself who's lounging in a bathrobe, eating a bowl of purple popcorn. Not Zen, not doing taxes, just there, vibing.

"Hey, what's up?" I ask, grabbing a piece of popcorn from his bowl. I pop it in my mouth. It tastes like shit.

Bathrobe Me shrugs. "Just waiting for enlightenment to finish downloading. You?"

"Same. But I figured I'd explain whatever this is to the reader before their brain dribbles out their nose."

Popcorn Me smirks. "Good luck with that."

I gesture for you to come closer, ready to break it down. "Okay, check it out. There are infinite timelines, right? So that means infinite versions of you, of me, of everyone. Some of them are killing it—like enlightened monks floating three feet off the ground, all *'Oh, I'm one with the universe'*—and others are just… figuring out if they can nap for another five minutes without getting fired."

I point to another version of me, sitting cross-legged, floating in mid-air like he's some super yogi. He's glowing, and not in a subtle, ethereal way—more like a human light bulb that's one Zen thought away from turning into a rave.

"That guy? Total cosmic master," I explain, watching Enlightened Me lazily float by, chewing on what looks like a glowing orb. He's not doing it spiritually—he's doing it like someone chews gum out of sheer boredom. "Yeah, he's got it all figured out. He's fully enlightened, baby. No more questions, no more suffering, no more fucking taxes. But look at him—he's bored as shit. There's no thrill left. He's just waiting for me—well, him—to mess things up so he can swoop in and feel superior."

You blink at me, clearly still processing. I get it, I do, so I keep the explanation rolling. "The thing is, all these versions of me? They're all valid. Every single one of them. There's no 'right' version of me—or you. Some of them are failures, some are enlightened monks, some are truly horrific, some are just eating popcorn. But we're all part of the same cosmic tapestry, each playing our part. Some are winning, some are losing, some are

just... floating. But we're all the same guy."

And just then—because, of course—a door bursts open. Lots of doors in this place, incidentally. Enter Fuckup Me. He stumbles into the room, clearly drunk, with a half-empty bottle of vodka clutched in one hand and the wild eyes of a man who's seen some shit. His shirt's stained, his hair's a mess, and his vibe screams "I'm over it."

"YOU!" Fuckup Me points at me dramatically, almost tripping over his own feet. "You think you're sooooo enlightened, don't you? You think you're the main character in this cosmic movie, huh?"

***"I am the main character"* I sigh, rubbing my temples. "Oh, great. It's *that* version of me. The one who never got off the couch and still thinks the world owes him a hug."**

Popcorn Me snickers again, clearly enjoying the show.

Fuckup Me staggers closer, poking me in the chest with one shaky finger. "You think you've got it all figured out, but you don't know shit! You're just as big a fuck-up as the rest of us! Enlightenment? Pfft. It's a joke, man."

I roll my eyes. "Alright, man, take a seat, have some popcorn. We're all part of the same thing. You, me, Enlightened Me, Popcorn Me—we're all just playing our part in the cosmic circus. So chill. I'm trying to teach my homie here about peace and love."

But Fuckup Me isn't having it. He's in full rant mode now, the kind you can only pull off with the right mix of anger and too much vodka. "I don't want to chill! I want ANSWERS. Why am *I* the screw-up, while *you* get to float around pretending to be enlightened?"

And just as Fuckup Me's about to fully lose it, Enlightened Me

floats over, still gnawing on his glowing heavenly gobstopper. He hovers there for a second, looking bored but wise in that "I've heard all this before" kind of way.

"Hey," Enlightened Me finally speaks, his voice calm, like a warm breeze. "You're stuck because you *choose* to be stuck. You're free, man. Always have been. You're just too busy fighting to notice."

Fuckup Me blinks, like someone just slapped him with a fish. "What? That's it? That's your grand fucking wisdom?"

Enlightened Me shrugs. "Pretty much. You're not stuck. You're just too distracted to realize it."

Fuckup Me stares at him, his vodka-fueled rant slowly fizzling out as he collapses into a chair. He lights two cigarettes at once, taking long drags as he stares off into the distance like a philosopher in a bar. Maybe he's contemplating life, or maybe he's just wondering how much vodka he has left. Either way, something clicks.

I turn to you, grinning. "He's about to have a breakthrough. Or maybe he'll just keep drinking. Either way, he'll figure it out. Eventually."

And that's the thing—there are infinite versions of us, playing infinite roles across infinite realities. And they're all valid. Every version of you is part of the bigger picture, part of the cosmic game. Some of us are floating monks, some are popcorn-eaters, and some are raging drunkards. But we're all the same—just different parts of the journey, different notes in the same symphony of existence.

As I explain this, Couch Potato Me shouts from across the room, "Hey! You guys wanna binge-watch *Ancient Aliens*? It's got some real gems!"

I shake my head. "Nah, man. We're good. Thanks, though." Already living that shit.

Couch Potato Me shrugs, goes back to his reruns.

"See?" I say, turning back to you. "Infinite versions of me. Infinite timelines. Infinite bullshit. And yet, somehow, it's all perfect. Every failure, every success, every bad haircut—it's all part of the cosmic game. And we're all playing our parts, whether we know it or not."

I pause, letting it sink in before I smile again. "Now, how about we get the hell out of here before Fuckup Me gets on his next existential rant?"

We walk out, leaving the infinite versions of us behind, each one doing its thing, playing its part in the grand cosmic joke. And as we step back into the endless void, I can't help but laugh.

Chapter 22: Come in soul station, we cracking heads, over.

We're floating above Earth now. Way above. No fancy ships, no astral planes—just the wide expanse of space, Earth spinning below us like a lonely beach ball in a sea of black. You're taking it all in while I'm kinda busy with more important matters. Like, for example, dealing with this army of higher versions of me stationed all around the globe. Why? Because something's stinking up Earth and trying to snatch souls as they leave.

I nudge you, pointing toward the chaos. "See that? Those weird, stinky, floaty things trying to kidnap souls on their way out? Yeah, I don't fucking like that."

One of my shredded higher selves—let's call him *Higher Bouncer Me*—is elbowing the shit out of some five-armed soul-snatcher. There's no sound in space, so we can't hear the thing scream, but we can feel the impacts. Bouncer Me's like a nightclub bouncer, waving souls through to the afterlife while tossing out the riff-raff who try to force reincarnation and sell second rate drugs around the earth. But instead of velvet ropes, it's just this big-ass expanse of, well, *the beyond*. VIP access to the great unknown.

"Every time someone dies, these parasite things try to snatch 'em up," I explain casually, like this isn't the weirdest shit you've ever seen. "I don't know if this is real or if I made it up, but either way, I'm sticking with it." I glance at you. "And yeah, apparently, I've got a whole bunch of me doing this job."

Another one of my higher selves swoops in with a spiritual roundhouse kick to the things head. "GET LOVED, motherfucker!" I shout, just for fun. You know, to keep things lively.

You're watching all of this with wide eyes—half in awe, half in "what the actual hell am I seeing?" mode. But up here? It's just another day at the office now.

"We're basically psychic ferrymen," I say, laughing. "Except no boats. No coins for Charon. Just making sure souls get where they need to go. We do a shit load of break dancing for some reason as well. But here's the thing—every soul gets a choice. They decide where they're headed next. That's where the real fun kicks in."

I give you a wink. "Maybe this is real, maybe not. But who cares, right? It's fun. Plus, they haven't made any laws for this shit yet, so I'm doing it."

A soul floats past, glowing softly, like some kind of spirit firefly. I nod toward it. "Let's follow that one."

And *zing zang zoom*, we're zipping through the Aether. You can't feel the wind because there's no wind in space, but it sure feels like it. Next thing we know, we're at the afterlife—a place that's less fluffy clouds and harps and more like a cosmic bus station. Souls are just milling about, looking like they're waiting for their next transfer. Some look excited, others bored out of their minds, and one guy's standing there like he forgot why he even showed up.

"That's the thing," I say, pointing at the soul we followed. "Death? It's not this dramatic, heavy thing. It's more like a universal glitch. A cosmic reset button. This guy already remembers his past lives and knows—you get to choose your next move. No 'game over' bullshit here. You get to decide where the hell you're going next. Half of these guys are probably pissed they didn't do any real spiritual work. Again."

The soul we followed drifts toward a spiritual kiosk, where some jellyfish-bureaucrat hybrid floats, handing out glowing tickets. And here's the catch—the ticket's got *options*. The soul stares at it for a moment, weighing choices like a kid picking ice cream flavors: reincarnate as a human, try out alien life, or head back to the source for a nap. He looks like he's going to argue with the jelly but his higher self comes over to him. It calmly explains to itself that the little soul can do whatever it wants but one of these options would be really really good for it right now. The whole game's a bit like that to be honest. Basically, there's literally no reason to worry about dying. Qapla'! Though I feel like I should add that I don't want anyone to kill themselves.

With a little shimmer, the soul makes a decision, and whoosh—gone. Off to its next adventure. Or off to the soul version of a coffee shop, who knows!

"See that?" I say, nudging you. "That soul just picked its next gig. Could be reincarnating as a human again, or maybe it's going alien this time. Could even be taking a breather as a sentient tree on some distant planet. Might just be formless somewhere. The point is, they *choose*. Death isn't some big final curtain call—it's more like, 'Oops, time for another round. New skin, new level. New chapter, new book.'"

I point at another soul floating nearby, looking as lost as a tourist in an infinite mall realm. "That guy? Still deciding. He's got options—Earth, Zeta-5, maybe even a stint as a mushroom. Souls aren't supposed to just get recycled. They gotta *want* their next experience."

We stroll through the afterlife like we own the place, watching souls flick through their options like they're browsing vacation brochures. It's spiritual, sure, but it's also bureaucratic as hell. Like a cosmic DMV, except instead of waiting to get your license renewed, you're picking which life you're about to jump into next.

Suddenly, an intercom voice echoes out: "Soul 327000000, please report to the reincarnation hub. You'll be respawning as the spirit of a river on Zeta-5."

I laugh, shaking my head. "See? Death's just a checkpoint, man. You pick your next role, roll the dice, and you're off again. New life, new adventure. You might even do a continuation of an old one. It's like leveling up in a video game. You're not done—you just get a different skin, a new set of powers, and you're back in the action. The best part? You can *always* come back for more."

We walk past more of my higher selves ferrying souls along. One of them gives me a respectful nod as another soul confidently chooses its path and vanishes in a flash of light. You can feel the energy here—it's not some solemn affair. It's like the universe's biggest 'choose your own adventure' book, and every soul is writing their next chapter. It's exciting, it's fun.

The soul we followed earlier reappears, now sporting a slick new alien body—three eyes, tentacles, the works. It looks down at itself, then glances at us, gives a little wave, and floats off, ready to start its next big adventure.

"See?" I say, grinning. "It's not random. Death's not the end. It's just a glitch, a reset, a chance to pick what's next. And the souls? They know it. They're cool with it. They get to choose. It's like playing the best game in the universe, where you never run out of lives—you just keep hitting respawn with a different character sheet. Being on earth makes you forget all this shit. It just isn't usually relevant is it? Well I'm making it relevant."

We stroll a little further, watching souls drift through their options like they're shopping for their next body on a cosmic eBay. "So," I say, glancing at you. "Still scared of death? Or ready to pick your next ride?" You look a bit pale.

I pause for dramatic effect. "Not right now, obviously. I meant like in 300 years or something. No rush dude."

We both laugh, the sound echoing through the cavernous soul station as we continue our stroll through the afterlife, leaving behind the chaos of Earth realm and embracing the infinite possibilities of what's next.

Chapter 22: Cosmic Interconnectedness (AKA, The blues brothers is a must watch)

Our physical forms rematerialize floating above a block of flats. Because why not? We do what we want. The sun's shining, a few puffy clouds drifting lazily across the sky, and the sea's doing its thing—being all blue and wet just a short walk away. A perfect day for... cleaning stairs.

You know that feeling? When you just know something's off? Like walking into a room right after someone's had a fight, and the air feels thick, heavy, like someone poured awkward tension all over the place? That's the universe working its tangled magic. Energy and shit. I used to think everything was separate—each little bubble existing on its own. But after, y'know, *buddha mode*, I started to get it. Everything's connected, even if I can't see the strings pulling it all together. I can *feel* it now. I'm part of this ball of strings, actively tugging the ones I want. That subtle pull when something I do affects something—or someone—else. Like ripples in a pond, but with way more chaos.

It's not like I see glowing neon wires connecting people and places—though, hey, that'd be cool. I'm the funny guy, not the "completely reprogram the vision centers of your brain" guy. Instead, it's more like a nudge in the back of my mind, a little pulse that whispers: *yeah, you just did something, and it matters*. Even if it seems small. It's all connected. Every little thing I do sends out ripples, and those ripples affect the people and things around me. Maybe not immediately. Maybe not in ways I can predict. But it's there, whether I like it or not.

I wave my hand, and the roof of the building disappears beneath us, giving us a full view inside. We can see The Narrator—me, of course—wearing a cowboy hat and mopping the floors like a man possessed. Like someone who believes every push of the mop is changing the world. Changing the universe.

Take last Friday. Easily a top-three day of the week for mopping. There I was, scrubbing the floors, blasting *The Blues Brothers* as loud as I could, and dancing like Christopher Walken on bath salts. Not the cool, stylish kind of dancing—more like I was laying eggs in my pants and forgot how human limbs are supposed to move. But here's the thing: I was having fun. I was in the zone, pumping out good energy like I was getting paid to be ridiculous. Which, technically, I am.

Then I notice the neighbor across the street. She's watching me through the big windows in the hallway. I didn't see her at first, but when I did, she was already there, smiling. Maybe she was having a rough day. Maybe her week sucked. But seeing me flail around like a goose trying to breakdance? That gave her permission to lighten up, even for just a second. That's powerful shit, man.

Next thing you know, she's humming while she washes dishes. Passersby hear her wonderful voice. The good vibes are spreading. Later that day, she goes out for a walk and waves at a stranger she'd normally ignore. That stranger? Nothing weird, he's just been feeling invisible for months, like nobody even notices he's alive. And that one little wave? It *really* mattered to him. And on and on it goes, rippling out from my goofy mopping routine. Like, who knew acting like an idiot could change the energy of an entire neighborhood? Of an entire city?

Here's the thing. I can feel energy now. Good, positive energy is like a warm bath; bad, negative energy feels like quicksand. When I'm in the zone, I pump out good energy. Doesn't matter if anyone else can feel it. I know it's there. So, as I sing and dance mopping floors in some random residential building, I'm affecting the lives of the people around me. Maybe they hear me outside, laughing, having a good time. Maybe I hold the door open for them and provide one of my iconic one-liners. It doesn't matter how small the action is. What matters is that I'm genuinely trying to make things a little better. I find happy people generally don't act like assholes. They spread that good energy too. So, I just act, knowing that everything I do, feel, or think is contributing to the greater good. Who knows if it's doing anything on a cosmic level? But it feels right, and that's enough for me.

Just then, the roof flickers back into place, but we don't move. We're still floating above, watching the ripples spread out like invisible waves, pulsing through the people below. We can see Kevin standing on a nearby rooftop hula hooping. Probably some alien thing. I doubt he's just hula hooping. "I love just hula hooping!" he calls over to us. Bastard.

"See that?" I nudge you, turning us away from Kevin. "It's not just about feelings, man. Every action has an impact. Hold the door for someone, and you might make their day. Cut someone off in traffic, and that bad vibe can mess up their entire week. It's all connected."

You nod, starting to get it, but then I hit you with the deeper stuff.

"But here's the thing: it's not just little stuff. What about the big stuff? What happens when someone really fucks up? Like, what kind of ripple do you think was sent out when they dropped the first atomic bombs—*on people*? I bet the strings are still shaking from that. *As above, so below* wasn't just some mystical bullshit. You set off a fuck-huge bomb? You're not just wrecking cities—you're wrecking timelines, dimensions, *realities*. Pulling on strings we don't even know exist yet. Like fish accidentally turning the entire ocean into shit because they didn't know what water is. That bomb didn't just rattle Earth; it yanked strings across the universe. Alien civilizations probably felt it. Whole timelines might have been torn apart. The ripple? It never stopped."

I pause, letting that sink in.

"But even a sneeze could yank a string. Like sneezing on someone on the bus, then that guy ends up late to work because he's sanitizing his hands, and that makes his boss reschedule a meeting with a client who ends up closing a bigger deal because of the timing. And on and on it goes, sneezes and bombs, all part of the same damn web."

"Every move, every breath, every thought—it's all connected. And that's kinda beautiful, but also? It's a lot of responsibility. You're never acting alone. We're all pulling on the same cosmic web, whether we know it or not."

Then I glance at you, seeing the gears turning in your head. And I get it—it's a lot. But the thing is, it's not that overwhelming once you understand it. Plus, we're all in it together.

"Yeah, it sounds chaotic as hell," I admit, "but it also means you're never really alone. Every step you take is part of this giant cosmic dance. We're all pulling on the same invisible strings, and somehow? It works."

As if on cue, a man below walks out of the building and bumps into a random stranger. They exchange a few words, smile, and head their separate ways. A few moments later, the guy helps an elderly woman cross the street, while the stranger he bumped into holds the door open for a group of schoolkids. Who knows what those next people will go on to affect? Maybe the next Einstein is powered by that elderly woman's meals? You get me?

"See?" I say, pointing. "That's the ripple. Small as hell, but it spreads. And it grows. We don't always see it, but it's there. So, don't worry about changing the world, just keep dancing. Keep sending out the good stuff. It'll sort itself out on its own."

As we start to fade away from the scene, I lean in and whisper, "Do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life, bud."

We fade into the clouds, leaving the narrator below to thrash-mop his way through the multiverse. I let one rip as we disappear into nothingness, but it's a book, so you didn't hear it—and thank the universe, you didn't smell it either.

Fuck I love living in a reality where I can make fart jokes. So good.

Chapter 24: Ego: To Kill or Not to Kill

We step into an office—a high-rise in some swanky, soulless downtown. You know the type: sterile white walls, glass doors, and the kind of silence that screams, "We're too busy making money to make noise." It smells like overpriced coffee, ambition, and bullshit.

Behind a sleek mahogany desk, in an absurdly large corner office, there he is: *My Ego*. The bastard's wearing *that* cowboy hat—the one I stuffed in the back of the closet after realizing I couldn't pull it off. But Ego? Oh, he's rocking it. Tailored suit, feet kicked up on the desk, cigar smoldering in his hand, and a grin so smug it's practically weaponized. Imagine if Patrick Bateman and Clint Eastwood merged into one cocky, overconfident dude, and then decided to run a hedge fund. That's him.

"Well, look who finally decided to show up," Ego says, tipping the hat without even bothering to look up from his paperwork. "What, are you finally ready to deal with me? Book's almost over hoss. Better late than never, I guess."

I'm already irritated. I completely forgot this was a book. Oh well. "Not here to 'deal' with you. Just here to figure out how we're gonna coexist without me murdering you."

Ego chuckles, blowing a cloud of smoke in my direction. It's the kind of laugh that makes you want to leap across the desk and punch him right in the perfectly chiseled jawline. "Good luck with that, cowboy."

This son of a bitch. I've killed him before, but it didn't stick. I'm not even sure it's supposed to.

The room is full of trophies—not real ones, of course. Just projections of everything I've ever wanted. The dream job. The perfect goldfish. The ripped-from-a-magazine BBQ pitmaster lifestyle. Hell, there's even a gleaming gold statue of me pulling off a flawless *kickflip*—something I gave up after realizing my pro-skater phase was never gonna happen. I never owned a

skateboard. But every trophy? It's got a glowing crack running down the middle. Imperfect. Just like the idea of "success" that Ego keeps chasing.

"So, what's the deal?" I ask, stepping closer. You're pressed up against the back wall trying to turn invisible. "Aren't I supposed to kill you? Isn't that the whole spiritual mantra? Meditate your ass off until you don't care about shiny things anymore?"

Ego laughs—like, full-on belly laughs. He pulls a compact mirror out of the desk drawer and gives his reflection a once-over. "Yeah, well, good luck with that, Zen Master. First of all, you *are* a shiny thing. Second of all, you *can't* kill me. And third of all, You *need* me. Who do you think gets shit done? Enlightenment isn't gonna pay the bills or stop you from looking like a chump at your high school reunion. That's where I come in."

I hate to admit it, but he's got a point. Walking around in a blissed-out state is great and all, but who's gonna remind me to brush my teeth before I leave the house? Who's gonna care about my ambitions or the things that make me human? Ego pays the bills. Ego's necessary. Annoying as hell, but necessary. At least on this Earth.

"You're a tool," I say, circling the desk. "That's all you are. A tool. You're not supposed to run the show."

Ego grins wider—if that's even possible. "Says the guy who gets twitchy every time someone's funnier than him at a party. You love me, man. You love the hat too—admit it. You're just too scaredy cat to wear it in public."

He's right about the hat. But there's no way I'm giving him that satisfaction.

"I don't need you to fucking run things," I say, narrowing my eyes. "You're like... logistics. Important, sure, but not the CEO."

"Cute analogy," Ego says, tipping the cowboy hat. "*Bitch*. But let's be real. I'm more than that. I'm the one who gets you out of bed, who tells you you're better than the guy down the street with the six-pack abs. You think you've killed me every time you meditate or hit some new spiritual milestone, but

then—boom—you catch yourself checking that reflection. Wondering if anyone noticed how *enlightened* you are. And who's there to point it out? *Me*."

He's right. Damn it, he's 100% right. No matter how much I try to bury him, Ego's always lurking in the corner, flexing in front of a mirror. Maybe the trick isn't to kill him. Maybe it's to keep him in check—like a wild horse that needs taming. I've never seen a horse, but I feel like they have a face you could punch if it came to that.

"You're just scared of being irrelevant," I say, leaning on the desk, staring him down. "You think I'll forget about you once I hit Nirvana. But here's the thing—you're part of me. I'll never leave you behind. You're my bro. You just need to know your place."

Ego leans forward, cigar clenched between his perfect teeth. For a second, I think he's gonna hit me with another snarky line, but instead, he smirks and tosses something my way. The cowboy hat. The *real* one. The one that used to be a beaver. The one I haven't worn in years.

"You think you can handle this?" he asks, eyes gleaming with that challenge I know too well.

I take the hat, feeling its weight in my hands. It's just a hat. But it's more than that, too. Confidence. Swagger. Ego. I put it on, and for the first time? It fits. It feels right.

"Yeah," I say, standing taller. "Fuck yeah."

Ego steps back, tipping his own hat. "Good. Because I'm not going anywhere. But maybe we can figure this out together. Partner."

Then, just as I'm about to walk out, Ego tosses *you* a hat, too. Not a funny little prop hat. No bullshit. Straight-up cowboy hat. You catch it, and I see you sizing it up. Good. Put it on. Nice.

I glance at Ego one last time before turning toward the door. The corporate office starts to fade behind us, the sterile white walls dissolving into something

much cooler as we step into the light. Hats still on our heads. Ego's still around, somewhere. But for now?

I'm the one in control.

I blow into the smoking chapter, spin it around on my finger like an old-timey revolver, and slide it back into the holster.

"C'mon, bud. End of the lines waiting."

Cue banjo music.

Chapter 25: Golden Age Hell in a Cell

We're standing in a spotlight. Darkness all around us, with springy canvas under our feet. "This is it, kid. The golden age. It's about to start right here, right now. We've seen a lot. We've learned a lot. And now, it's time to put it all into practice. Everyone in the universe is here in this metaphor to see how Earth does! Will we join our brothers and sisters? Or will we destroy the Earth? So fun!" You squint, trying to see past the blinding arena lights as the crowd goes absolutely wild.

We're in the universe's biggest stadium. I'm talking miles and miles of seating in every direction, packed with screaming, adoring souls. Not just humans, either—aliens, cosmic beings, and entities I don't even have the words for. They're holding up signs, chanting in languages we can't even comprehend. One sign catches my eye: *"Kick Its Ass, 7th-Dimensional Being! Love from Lyrans."* I give a little wave.

In the very middle of it all, seemingly tiny amidst the grandeur, is the wrestling ring, with its entry tunnel stage thing. That's where we are. I jump on the ropes, throw my hands up, and yell mindlessly at the crowd like I've done this a million times before. Who knows, maybe I have.

Just as I'm about to ask how you feel, heavy metal music rips through the air. O fortuna played by the devil himself. The crowd boos immediately. The noise is deafening.

It's the **evil cloud**.

The cancer on the Earth. The manifestation of everything shitty in the world. The reason I have to work at all. My nemesis. The black cloud billows out of the entrance tunnel, oozing its way down the long ramp towards us. The heavy metal screeches, tearing into our souls. Pyrotechnics explode and lightning cracks through the sky as the cloud slithers toward the ring. It's like the universe is mad at its own creation. The cloud pours into the ring, this holy place,

corrupting it just by being there. It forms into a roughly spheroid shape, crackling with negative energy. Beer bottles thrown from the crowd explode on its essence. It feels like the anti-universe, if such a thing even exists.

The music cuts off, leaving only the eerie crackle of the cloud, heavy in the silence. The crowd groans. I can feel the weight of their disgust.

"First of all, I hate that you've ruined metal for everyone, cloud," I say, exasperated. I can't help it.

FUCK YOU, the cloud says, its voice a sensation like rusty nails being driven into our minds. The crowd groans louder, boos raining down from the stands. Somehow, I know the cloud is flipping them off. Yeah, this bastard's chewing the scenery, milking the moment like some washed-up wrestler trying to stay relevant.

I can feel you beside me, vibrating with tension, excitement, fear—all the shit that's been building up to this moment. And me? I'm weirdly calm. We've been here before, haven't we? Fighting this cloud, this thing, this essence of everything that's ever sucked. The fear, the hate, the hopelessness. The stuff that makes you want to give up and curl into a ball.

But not today.

I glance at you. "We've come this far, right? You ready for this?" You nod, though I can see the look of *'What the fuck?'* I've come to love so much on your face, even through your shades. Same here, bud. Same here.

"Alright," I say, cracking my neck and rolling my shoulders. Cowboy hats tilted just so. "Let's do this. Cloud's been fucking talking shit for eons. Time to put this bitch in its place."

The cloud crackles menacingly, shifting in a way that suggests it's getting ready to strike. But I can't help myself. I turn to you and whisper, *"Hey, by the way, I'm thinking of growing a beard, what do you think?"* You snort, and the tension breaks for just a second before the fight begins.

I look back at the cloud, feeling the energy of the crowd, the universe itself vibrating with anticipation. This is it. All the lessons we've learned together, all the shit we've been through. It comes down to this. But here's the thing: the cloud isn't just here to mess with us this time. It's here to end us. To make sure Earth never gets its golden age. It's everything that's ever sucked in the world, but magnified, turned into this malevolent force. It WANTS you to work in an office indefinitely. Nah not on my fucking watch.

I smile at it. "Oh, we've been here before, cloud. But this time? I'm not just some guy mopping cave floors anymore. I've leveled up bitch."

I WILL BREAK YOU, the cloud thunders in our minds. But I know—it won't. It can't. Not anymore.

Kevin appears in the center of the ring looking sharp as fuck in a three piece suit. A microphone descends on a cable into his hand. "This is the moment you've all been waiting for!" he calls, pausing as the reference to time gets a laugh from the crowd. " Billions of lives over thousands of years. Everyone's favorite little crucible the Earth, has somehow inched its way to the dawn of another golden age. And it looks like it's all coming down to two measly little souls. What a nail biter! Will they make it? Or will they fumble the onion?" He screams into the mic as the crowd goes ballistic. People are tearing up seating and throwing it around like confetti. Kevin disappears.

Ding ding ding.

The cloud strikes first, sending tendrils of darkness spiraling out like chains, trying to pin us down. I dodge, throwing myself across the ring with the kind of grace I wish I'd had in gym class. You move too, your hat still firmly in place, but this thing's fast, way faster than it looks for a floating ball of misery.

The fight's on. We're ducking, weaving, and landing hits on this swirling mass of negativity, but it's like trying to punch water. Cos we're just punching a cloud. Every time we land a blow, the cloud just reforms, laughing in that rusted-nail-in-your-brain way.

The crowd's roaring, but I can barely hear them over the pounding of my own heart. And then... the cloud shifts. It does something I've seen before. A deep, dark chuckle fills the air.

"What's it doing?" someone shouts, but I already know.

From the center of the cloud, a figure emerges. A twisted, shadowy version of... me. My past self, or maybe the part of me I've been running from this whole time. The one that hated himself. The one that believed the bullshit. He's got that same stuff I used to carry around—my old life, my old baggage—and he's looking right at me.

I freeze. I've fought this thing a thousand times before, but seeing it now, in the flesh, at crunch time. It's like all the progress I've made doesn't matter. I'm just that guy again. The one who didn't know his place. The one who thought he was small, insignificant. It's like being thrown back into the worst parts of myself. Every insecurity, every failure, every time I wanted to disappear.

The cloud chuckles louder as the past me lunges. I don't move. I can't. He's swinging a bottle, and I'm just standing there like a fucking deer in headlights. The blow lands, the bottle doesn't shatter, and I go down. Hard.

"GET UP!" I scream at myself, but I can't. The past me stands over me, bottle raised, ready to strike again. I feel the cloud wrapping around me, suffocating, pulling me deeper into that pit I thought I'd escaped. Why did I ever think I could do it? The books a fucking piece of shit. The golden age was a pipe dream. All that progress, all that self-work, it feels like it's slipping away. It was all pointless.

I can't breathe. I'm drowning in this cloud, in this shitty version of myself that I thought I'd killed off for good. I couldn't save you...

And then... you move.

I hear the sound of pages flipping. The *Mopinomicon*. I'd forgotten all about it. It really was supposed to have a plot. You've got it in your hands, thumbing through the chaotic, scribbled mess of our journey. Every insane page, every note I scrawled down in the hopes it would make sense someday.

Your eyes zero in on it, right there in chapter 5: 'I really do love your company'. You know what you have to do now.

The crowd goes silent. The arena holds its breath. The universe itself seems to pause.

Your eyes widen, and for the first time in the entire book...

You speak.

"I get it now," you say, your voice clear and strong. "You were never supposed to be the one saving *me*. You'll always be a fucking mess dude. That's why I love you. I was always supposed to be the one saving *you*."

And just like that, it clicks. You're enlightened.

Thunderstruck starts blasting through the speakers.

You slam the book shut, power practically radiating from you, and everything changes. The stage lights flare, casting the whole arena in blinding white light. The past me, the cloud, everything starts flickering, like reality itself is glitching. The edges of everything seem to smolder, catching and burning with spiritual energy as it washes over everyone. You look like a star.

The ***real*** you steps forward, holding the *Mopinomicon* high, and the whole crowd erupts as every single being who's ever been connected to me starts barrelling out of the tunnel. Friends, wrestlers, enemies, that dude I gave a high-five to once on the bus—they all charge toward the ring, fists raised, ready to throw down. Every possible fictional character, every teacher I had in school, every member of my soul family. Kevin. Pogo. The Pirates. Ego. Everyone. And you, staring at me.

They slam into the cloud with a force that shakes the entire arena. You can hear the *crash* as thousands of fists, feet, and metaphysical energy attacks rain down on the cloud. The thing is flailing now, completely overwhelmed. **THIS GUY WASN'T SUPPOSED TO HAVE FRIENDS** it screeches pathetically as the ring grows to allow the flood of bodies.

But this isn't just some cosmic beatdown. This is all of us—everyone who's ever been part of my journey, part of *our* journey—finally coming together to deal with the shit that's held us back.

The ring is chaos. The past me is swinging that bottle into my head like it's fucking weaponized ennui, and I'm too paralyzed by everything it represents to fight back. Every insecurity, every failure, every moment I thought I wasn't enough—it's all right there, wrapped up in this twisted version of me.

And then I hear you.

"Stop," you say, your voice cutting through the noise, through the chaos. It's firm. Certain. Stronger than I've ever heard it before. "He's not your enemy."

I blink, still reeling from the last hit. I spit out several of my teeth. "What?"

You step forward, the *Mopinomicon* still in your hand, but now it's glowing, like it's alive. "Your past? Your mistakes? That's not something you need to fight. It's not something you can *ever* fight. That version of you isn't here to beat you—it's here because it's *part* of you. You've said it yourself you idiot. It always will be."

The crowd goes silent, hanging on your every word. Even the past me hesitates, bottle frozen mid-swing, as if hypnotized by your words..

"You can't keep trying to kill it," you continue. "Because every time you do, it's just going to come back stronger. The pain, the doubt, the insecurities—they're not things you bury or beat down. They're things you *accept*. Things you learn from."

I'm on my knees now, still trying to catch my breath, but your words are hitting me harder than any blow could. You walk over to me, kneeling down beside me.

"You don't need to fight this version of yourself," you say softly. "You need to help him. Like you helped me. Because the truth is, all those people you've helped, all those souls fighting alongside us right now? You couldn't have done it without the past you. He's part of why you're here. He's part of why you're strong enough to stand up to this cloud."

I look up at the past me. He's still there, beer in hand, but now he's just... standing. Watching. And I see it—he's not my enemy. He never was. He's terrified, just like I was. He's so lost, just like I've been. He's not here to take me down. He's here because he needs help, too.

You reach out, placing your hand on my shoulder. "You've been helping people this whole time. But it's time to finally help yourself. To help *him*." You pick up my cowboy hat and hand it to me.

Slowly, I get to my feet, the weight of your words sinking in. I move toward the past me, every shaky step feeling like it's breaking through years of old wounds. The beer in his hand is trembling now, like he doesn't know what to do next.

"I'm so fucking sorry," I say, and I mean it. "I've been trying to kill you for so long, but I didn't truly accept that you're part of me. I wouldn't be here without you. All the shit we went through together, it was hard. So hard. But it made me stronger. Made me wiser. Made me kinder. It made me who I am. *You* made me who I am. Thank you."

The past me stares, and the bottle falls to the ground with a soft *thud*. His eyes water as he starts to talk. "Every time it hurt I thought of you. Every hardship I had to endure would be worth it if it made *you* stronger. I would suffer so *you* don't have to. If it taught *you* a lesson you could share. Even if I didn't know what was going on at the time, I knew *you* would. I'm proud of who we became. I never dreamed we would come so far."

I reach out, and for the first time, I pull him into a hug. It feels... right. Like I'm finally accepting the parts of myself I've been running from all this time.

The moment we connect, the entire arena erupts in cheers. The universal crowd goes wild, but it's not for the fight—it's for this. For the moment I stop fighting myself and start working with everything that brought me here.

And then you step forward, holding the *Mopinomicon* high. You grab the microphone. "You see? He was never alone. None of us are. All of us fighting out here—everyone who's been touched by him, or who's been part of his journey—we're all connected."

Suddenly, the crowd begins to move. People, souls, beings, everyone who's ever been connected to me—so everyone—rush toward the ring, joining the fight. But they're not just fighting for me—they're fighting for each other. For themselves. For the parts of themselves they've been afraid to face. We'll face anything together now.

You're standing tall, commanding the energy of the crowd, of the universe, and it's clear now—you're the key to all of this. The reader. You've always been part of this story, and now?

Now you're writing your fucking own.

The past me fades into smokey light, and I bounce lightly on my feet. I feel it now—this power, this connection. The insecurities, the doubt—they're still there, but they're *mine* now. They don't control me.

I look at you, standing tall with the *Mopinomicon* in one hand and a steel chair in the other. The classic finishing move.

"Ready to finish this?" I ask, the cowboy hat now firmly on my head, tilted just right.

"Let's do it," you say, grinning like you've been waiting for this moment your whole life. Who knows, maybe you have.

Together, we charge. The crowd roars, chanting our names, their voices blending into one universal cry of triumph around us. We raise the steel chair high, and with a battle cry of SHRONK, we swing the chair.

All of us in the universe, together - as one- we bring the chair crashing down on the cloud.

The sound is deafening. A final *crack* echoes through the void as the cloud shatters, pieces of it spiraling like diamonds out into the infinite, dissipating into the cosmos with a faint, lingering sparkle. Like starlight.

The ring is silent. The crowd? Breathless.

We did it.

"We fucking did it!" Kevin screams. Pogo trumpets majestically.

I lean back, looking up at the universe as the last remnants of the cloud dissolve. "You know, I could get used to this whole 'saving the world' thing."

You laugh, tossing the *Mopinomicon* to the side. "Not bad for a couple of sexy idiots, huh? I could get used to it too. Maybe I'll do some narrating." you say.

I laugh too, and for the first time in... ever, I feel whole. I feel free. I fucking love you dude. This was the best Tuesday I've had in ages.

We walk out of the ring, past the roaring crowd, past Kevin who's wiping tears from his eyes. "Beautiful," he mutters as we pass. "Absolutely beautiful."

As we step into the light, I throw an arm around you. "C'mon, kid. The golden age awaits. And I think we get some sort of TITLE BELTINOMICON."

And with one last cheer from the crowd behind us, we both high five Shiva simultaneously and disappear once again into the infinite, leaving the chaos of the past behind us for good.

The end?

Epilogue

We're in the Astral Bar. Welcomed as heroes. The idiots who saved the Universe or whatever. Typical. Here comes Jesus with a fruit basket pretending he knew we would do it. Pull up a chair dude join the party.

We've been on almost every set of shoulders in the place and the party doesn't seem to be slowing down. They love a golden age around here, it's basically happy hour. We managed to grab a big table and are reflecting and laughing about the journey. You, Jesus, Mohawk Narrator, My Wife, The Evil Cloud, The grey from chapter 13, Kevin and of course Pogo.

You're enlightened now so you don't even need to ask why the cloud and the mohawk guy are chilling with us.

I sip my chocolate milk and vodka and watch a clown walk by juggling several smaller clowns. What a day.

Mohawk Narrator turns to you. "So, what's your story?" he asks. You laugh.

"Something fucking crazy happened to me. I'm enlightened."

About the Author

Bodie Satva is an enlightened janitor and storyteller with a knack for blending the profound with the absurd. When not exploring cosmic mysteries or contemplating the nature of existence, Bodie can be found mopping floors and crafting wild, surreal narratives that invite readers to laugh, think, and question reality. Equal parts humorist and philosopher, Bodie believes that even the most mind-bending journeys should come with a side of laughter.